

Bond

by AutumnMobile12

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## 1. Chapter 1

Bond

Summary: Two dragon riders of different worlds and cultures converge.

His only warning was a vague shape within the clouds and a roar like thunder.

Then a man in armor astride a black dragon soared into view, just grazing Saphira's blue wingtip as they raced by. The rider wore a sable, full visor helm which disclosed nothing of his face but a pair of green eyes wide with shock. And clutched in his free arm was a dark purple dragon egg.

Eragon met the man's eyes for an instant before Saphira wheeled around and chased after the pair, releasing a jet of flames that just missed the tip of the black dragon's tail. An instant later, it spun around mid-flight and shot a white fireball from his mouth, which Saphira dodged it easily enough, but it was enough for their enemies to put some distance between them.

\_I told you this was a bad idea!\_ Saphira roared at Eragon. Silently, he agreed, though he wasn't about to admit it aloud. So it was a bad idea to leave the ship unattended why they scouted the area for land, but it wasn't as though anyone else was in the area.

\_Well, as you can see, you were wrong!\_

\_I know!\_

Saphira shot another bout of flames upon the pair once she caught up. The opposite dragon was much smaller than she was, though it flew as fast as an arrow, covering sufficient ground needed to counterattack. With at least twenty yards between them, it would spin around fire another flaming bullet at them, this time just grazing Saphira's wing.

\_He's done this before!\_ Eragon realized. \_This isn't the first time he's fought another dragon. Or another Rider!\_ This put him at a disadvantage, he realized, since the only dragon and Rider he'd ever fought had been Murtagh and Thorn.

Finding himself at a profound disadvantage in experience, Eragon thought back to his lessons with Oromis and Brom and remembered the vulnerable points on a dragon: the neck, beneath the wings, and the flanks. Drawing Brisingr, he shared his observations with Saphira, and then his plans.

\_Be careful. \_Saphira cautioned.\_ That loathsome lizard may be smaller, but that also means he's used to fighting those larger than him.\_

Eragon silently agreed, then extended tendrils of thought toward the black dragon, only to find a iron wall shielding its thoughts. Images of a boy no older than he'd been when he found Saphira's egg flashed through his mind, followed by a series of memories involving the same boy whether it was flying together, eating together, sleeping together, and defending each other. He broke off the contact as Saphira flew over the pair, striking at them with her forepaws and missing the rider by inches.

Then the two dragons locked talons and began to tear at one another, biting at each others' necks and kicking at their unarmored bellies. The black dragon battered at Saphira's head with his forepaws, screaming in fury as she shot a jet of flame at him. He sank his teeth into one of her legs and she howled and snapped at one of his wings, missed, then managed to dislodge him with a ferocious kick.

The black rider drew his own sword, a weapon that burned fire just as Brisingr did. In his right arm, he still cradled the stolen dragon egg, holding it as though it was his and his alone to protect. Eragon watched him deposit it into a leather shoulder bag, then he rose from the saddle and turned to face Eragon. The black dragon jerked to the side, snapping at one of Saphira's wings now, and his rider leaped toward Eragon, slashing his blade at him.

Eragon dodged the attack and struck at his opponent. Brisingr met the firesword in a shower of sparks, as though they dueled with swords fresh from a smith's forge. The black rider yelled in a mixture of pain and astonishment, retreated a couple paces, then struck again, harder than before. Again, Eragon met the attack easily, then struck himself, gaining the offense and forcing his opponent into submission. He did not have the upper hand long. Every time they converged it was for a brief moment before they broke apart, circled as best they could, then attacked again.

As he engaged the enemy for a fourth time, Eragon lashed a hand out to snatch the satchel, but the black rider's blade slapped it away, burning him for a second. Saphira twisted suddenly as she bit the

black dragon's tail, and both combatants were knocked off their feet. Eragon was the first to stand, followed by his opponent, who swung at him in a wide arc that would've cut his arm had he not raised Brisingr in time.

Dismayed at his ferocity, Eragon found it difficult to match his opponent's determination. Even with his inhumane speed and strength, he found himself unable to keep up with the black rider's attacks. Every time he thought the other would submit and concede defeat, a profound spark of anger flared behind his eyes and he resumed fighting with renewed ferocity as though he abhorred Eragon personally.

Then he thought of the battle under Farthen Dǽr, how he had defeated the Shade Durza, and how he was much more the farm boy of Carvahall then than he was now. If he could slay a monster like that, Eragon thought as he thwarted a stab from the other rider, then it was entirely possible for mortal man to kill a Rider.

With this in mind, he retaliated stronger than ever, forcing the rider back along Saphira's spine toward the hollow at the base of her neck. When he'd driven him back as far as her shoulder blades, the two dragons suddenly broke apart, a mere fifty feet above the sea. The black rider turned away from Eragon and ran along the length of Saphira's wing, launching himself into the air, although his dragon was soaring away. Eragon watched as he leveled himself out, spreading his arms to break his fall, then extended two triangular strips of canvas on either side of his body and glided the rest of the way toward his dragon.

\_Did you get the egg back?\_ Saphira asked.

\_No.\_ Eragon explained the manner in which the rider had protected it.

\_Perhaps dragon eggs have a much more significant value in these parts.\_ Saphira suggested. \_For all we know, it could be a sacred item.\_

That certainly explained the rider's fanatical behavior, Eragon thought as Saphira propelled herself after their retreating opponents. \_Or he's a thief and thinks it's a precious gemstone. That's what I thought your egg was until you hatched.\_

\_What!\_ Saphira snarled back indignantly.

Nonetheless, they had to get that egg back. Following the dragon and rider, Eragon was surprised to find they had almost disappeared in the clouds. "They're running!" He realized, then berated himself, \_Of course they are. They've got what they want after all.\_

Saphira needed no encouragement to race after them, expressing her fury in a roar that shook the sky like a thunderclap. The black rider looked back at them for an instant, then swerved to the left in a sharp turn, heading straight for the dark, indistinct shape of an island in the distance. Eragon frowned at the maneuver, studying the black dragon's tail. One side was black, like the rest of the beast, but the other was bright red. It couldn't be natural; it looked so out of place.

\_It's fake!\_ He thought.\_ Part of his tail is fake! It's made of some kind of fabric.\_

\_I could light it on fire if I could get close enough.\_ Saphira suggested.

\_No, that won't be necessary. I'll handle it. \_Carefully, Eragon raised his right hand, palm outstretched, and concentrated on his target. "\_Jierda!\_"

With a snap, the artificial tail shredded and broke apart. The other rider whirled around in surprise and, as expected, his black dragon wobbled with the loss and began to plummet toward the sea. A terrified roar and a human scream reached his ears as the pair fell out of sight beneath the clouds. Diving after them, he watched as the small dragon fanned out its wings, unsteadily gliding across the sky and heading straight for in the distance. His rider leaped out of the saddle and darted along the creature's spine and the length of his tail to inspect the damage.

What he found, Eragon could not say, but he quickly returned to the saddle, patting the side of his dragon's neck. The creature lurched as it flew, yet it balanced out its dark wings as best it could to coast through the air. The rider glared up at them but only maintained the expression until a gust of wind knocked them off balance, sending them both in a brief panic before they evened out again.

Twice, Eragon and Saphira tried to retrieve the egg and they were beaten off both times by either the rider's firesword or the dragon's snapping jaws. Although he considered using another spell to retrieve the egg, Eragon didn't want to risk a fight with magic on the off chance their adversary could use it. \_I suppose if he could, he would've fixed the tail by now.\_

\_It could be a bluff.\_ Saphira answered.

Using the words of death was an option, too, but simply killing them seemed a little extreme, not to mention neither of them were eager to slay another dragon. In the end, he chose to bend the elements somewhat, creating a warm updraft to smooth out the dragon's flight and see them safely to the island, which was almost directly beneath them now.

It was a large piece of land, easily the size Vroengard, the ancestral home of the Rider's, had been. A thick, evergreen forest covered the majority of the land mass, though one section had been devoted to farmlands, and to the east, Eragon could just make out the vague shape of a settlement. Angling over the trees, he let up on the draft and watched the pair drift toward the earth, until the black dragon's left wing suddenly struck a tree and threw him off balance with a startled roar.

Rider and dragon hit the ground, hard, and lay quietly in the dirt until the rider pushed himself upright with a grimace. He cried out to his dragon as it forced itself to its feet, then whipping around to roar hatefully at Saphira as she circled them. Leaping from her back, Eragon landed smoothly on the grass just as his opponent was staggering to his feet. Both dragons charged off into the undergrowth, leaving torn scrub, splintered tree limbs, and angry

roars in their wake.

The black rider turned to Eragon. His helm had been lost in the crash, yet he still had a firm hold on the satchel containing the stolen egg and his eyes were two narrow slits. He was older than him by a few years and, though hunched over in pain, a couple inches taller. The sword in his hand still burned red as the two began to circle on another. For the first time, Eragon noticed one of the interloper's legs ended below the knee, continuing to the ground as some version of a metal leg.

Filing this away for later, he locked his gaze on the rider, waiting for an opening to attack. Then one of the two dragons fighting in the distance roared in agony and the black rider whipped his head around to follow the sound. Seizing his chance, Eragon leapt forward and knocked the firesword from his hand.

An instant later, he'd thrown the rider to the ground, planting a boot between his shoulder blades and Brisingr at his neck. In addition, he had a hold on his wrist and was yanking his arm behind his back in a manner that should've been extremely painful. The rider struggled a little, yelling in pain, then suddenly went limp and his head dropped to the earth with a dull thud. Eragon frowned. Surely the fight hadn't gone out of him already.

He was just about to let go entirely and just keep Brisingr edge by his throat when his opponent gave a sudden twist and Eragon felt something strike the back of his head. He gave a pained shout but stayed upright, although dazed by the attack and the black rider easily squirmed out of his grip and darted out of reach, snatching up his sword in the process.

"Weren't expecting the metal leg, were you?" He asked with a smug grin.

Eragon growled and rose to his feet, gripping his sword tighter. "Tell me why you were on my ship." He demanded, though it felt odd referring to the vessel as 'his' personally. He'd traded the graceful elven ship for it some time ago on account the expert sailors in this part of the world claimed one-masted longboats were more practical in these waters.

The stranger blinked, then asked in a low, coercing tone, "Why do you have dragon eggs in your hold?"

Before Eragon could answer, the black dragon reappeared, charging from the brush and bowling him over as easily as a kitten with a moth, even going so far as to pin his sword arm to the ground. The black's rider was just as startled, staring at them wide-eyed before shouting to Eragon's dismay, "Bad dragon! Get off him! Toothless!"

Saphira charged out of the undergrowth in pursuit of the black dragon. Aside from a couple scratches on her muzzle and a vicious bite on her right foreleg, she seemed unhurt. Relieved, Eragon opened his mind to relay what had occurred, but she turned to knock down the black rider instead. He backed up a few paces, then rather unexpectedly removed something from his person that produced a putrid green gas that he ignited with a spark. Saphira pulled back in alarm, baring her ivory teeth in a snarl.

The second rider warily took a step toward her, extending his right hand until his palm hovered half a foot away from her snout. Saphira snorted suspiciously and narrowed her eyes at the offering, which seemed to perplex the rider, so he turned away and closed his eyes. Cocking her head to the side, her hostility diminished a fraction and she sniffed at the rider's gloved hand.

The black dragon pinning Eragon to the ground had gone still, fixing a glare on Saphira and seeming to have forgotten him altogether. Tentatively, Eragon reached out with his mind to touch the beast's, only to find, like before, nothing but a fierce and boundless devotion to his rider. His upper lip curled with a concern akin to that of a mother bear protecting her young or a man defending his family.

Saphira took no notice. The black rider didn't move. Then, slowly, she closed her crystal blue eyes and touched her nose to the rider's outstretched hand. The rider opened his green eyes and turned to look at her with a smile, raising his other hand to scratch her under her chin. "Hey, now. You're a sweet girl. Look at you."

Saphira opened her eyes and looked at Eragon. \_I don't think he means to harm us.\_

Eragon could see that for himself, and he was little disturbed by how easily this other rider had placated his dragon. Like an enormous cat, Saphira purred and nudged the rider with her nose, angling her head as he ran his fingers over her scales and closing her eyes again with a smile.

Likewise, the black dragon also relaxed. Still linked with him, Eragon sensed the creature's instinctive defenses lowering and he attempted soothing him with gentle thoughts. Just as Saphira's was, the black dragon's mind was vast and alien compared to a human's. Suddenly, he shook his head and fixed him with an intense glare before leaping away and settling on a nearby knoll to watch them.

Eragon rose to his feet, brushing himself off, then asked of Saphira, \_What was that all about?\_

\_It seemed like the right thing to do. \_She replied sheepishly.

Dismayed, he turned to the rider, who was eyeing him warily. It was clear from his demonstration he meant them no harm, which proved to Eragon's discomfort that he had been the aggressor in their battle. Yet now that they'd established the other was a formidable opponent, neither of them seemed willing to fight again.

A long, tense silence stretched between the four of them, broken by the screams of birds and wild animals that had been disturbed by the skirmish, along with something that sounded like a tree falling in the distance. The black rider winced at that, then turned to Eragon, "So, why is your cargo full of dragon eggs?"

Eragon remained quiet, wondering how to explain.

"Look, I don't want to seem rude or threatening, but you'd better

tell me what you're up to before every rider on Berk comes to see what was making all that racket a minute ago."

He raised an eyebrow and surveyed the damage around them, then returned his gaze to the rider. "You wouldn't know about the eggs if you hadn't been on the ship. So what were you doing there in the first place?"

Two pairs of green eyes glared at him, then the rider answered, "All right, one of our sentries spotted an unidentified ship nearby, and I came to investigate. Now about the eggs?"

"I'm transporting them from my homeland in search of a place to raise them safely."

The rider exchanged a glance with his dragon. "Dragon eggs belong with the mother dragons, and I can tell you from experience, they'll do anything to get their young back."

That made sense. "I'm afraid the parents of my charges are dead."

Horror crossed the man's face. "You killed them?" The black dragon snarled.

"No!"

Both of them were silent, studying the other suspiciously, as though expecting another attack. It would seem, Saphira said suddenly, speaking to both of them, The two of you have a story to tell.

The rider recoiled at the sound of Saphira's voice, stumbling backward so violently Eragon thought he was going to fall over. The black dragon, Toothless, pressed his snout into his back to support him, but his rider took no notice. "She speaks?"

Eragon frowned. "Doesn't yours?"

He shook his head. "Dragons don't talk."

Enough! Saphira roared before his confusion could escalate. Eragon, put away Brisingr and introduce us properly.

As he was bid, Eragon sheathed his sword and stepped forward, extending a gloved hand to the opposite. "I am Eragon Shadeslayer, Rider of Alagaësia. And this is my dragon, Saphira Bjartskular."

Cautiously, the black rider gripped his hand and gave a firm shake. "My name's Hiccup, of the isle of Berk. You've already met my friend, Toothless." The black dragon gave an uncanny imitation of a human laugh, bobbing his serpentine head up and down, which made Saphira snort derisively.

They were an odd pair of names, though Eragon did not comment and listened as Hiccup began a story from four years ago, how his people, the Vikings, and the dragons had fought over food and territory for centuries. The battles were fierce and claimed thousands of lives on both sides, including that of his mother when he was a babe. As he spoke, Eragon watched him work to repair the artificial tail he'd

broken, expertly sliding a bright yellow fabric over some kind of a connecting rod.

"Then I met Toothless, and everything changed." Toothless rubbed his head against his rider's and nearly knocked him over. "We've learned to train them and live with them. And now they're our greatest friends and allies."

"Like Eragon the Elder." Eragon grinned. Hiccup blinked uncomprehendingly, so he explained how, like the Vikings and the dragons, the elves and dragons in Alagaësia had fought a similar war in his homeland centuries ago, and how the elf Eragon brought an end to the bloodshed by secretly hatching and raising the white dragon Bid'Daum.

Hiccup was silent for some time, trading glances with Toothless, then said in an uncertain voice. "A â€¦ flattering comparison, truly. But I can assure you I'm human."

"I can see that."

"So elves exist in your land?"

"Aye, dwarfs and urgals as well."

Hiccup shook his head in bewilderment. "So what happened to this Eragon and Bid'Daum?"

So, Eragon described how the pair had established the Dragon Riders and how they came to protect and serve the people of Alagaësia, first as a means of communication between elves and dragons, then more significantly as rangers and peacemakers. He could tell from Hiccup's face the older man had never heard of such a structure.

"It sounds organized." He commented hesitantly. "My village is a madhouse on the best of days."

Eragon smirked. "And the worst?"

"A war zone." Hiccup frowned. "But what brings you here. I've never heard of Alagaësia, so you must've come a long way. With a cargo hold full of eggs no less."

Eragon then told an abridged version of how the Rider's had been destroyed by King Galbatorix and how fate had left three eggs in his possession, how Saphira had come to him by accident, and how together they'd fought the Empire and overthrown the king. "However, in order to rebuild the Riders, we needed a place to ourselves, so as not to show favoritism for one of the four races: men, elves, dwarfs, and urgals. And there was just no place like that in Alagaësia."

When he finished his tale, Hiccup remarked. "So you intend to never return to this Alagaësia in order to find a sanctuary for the eggs."

"I don't really have a choice."

"What about this Vroengard you mentioned? Surely that would have been a suitable home."



Eragon shook his head. "It's been uninhabitable since the Battle of Doru Araeba."

Hiccup was silent, trading glances with his dragon, who rumbled mournfully up at him. He patted his head. "I know, bud. It is sad."

\_They don't share the bond you and I have, do they.\_ Eragon said to Saphira.

\_No. But I think they have one of a different variety.\_

"What kind of dragon is she?" Hiccup asked, looking up at them again.

Now it was Eragon's turn to frown. "What?" He was about answer there was only one kind of dragon, but he turned to Toothless and observed the black dragon was undeniably different from Saphira, not only in size but in other aspects, such as his small head like that of an adder, his cat-like paws, and the lack of horns and neck spikes. "Are there other types of dragon in your lands?"

"Hundreds more." Hiccup replied, then spun around and removed a heavy, leather-bound book from a compartment in Toothless' saddle.

It was heavier than it looked when he handed it to him. Cracking it open to a page in the middle, Eragon found a detailed sketch of a very small but heavysset dragon that resembled a large bee. Its head was larger than the rest of its body and its short, stumpy tail looked a little like a bludgeon.

The names were interesting, and often quite literal if the illustrations and descriptions could be believed. Monstrous Nightmares whose entire bodies could ignite into an inferno, twin-headed Hideous Zippelbacks, Terrible Terrors roughly the length of his forearm, Deadly Nadders, Gronckles, Whispering Deaths, Changewings, Skrill, Smokebreaths, Skauldrons, and countless others, all unique from one another. Some had four legs, or two, or none at all. One species had four heads while another didn't even have wings.

\_It seems the dragons here are as diverse from one another as humans, elves, dwarves, and urgals in Alagaŕsia.\_ Saphira remarked over his shoulder.

"Dragons in my homeland were pretty much the same, aside from color." Eragon explained. "They didn't really have a specific name."

"Then...what does 'bjartskular' mean?"

"Brightscales."

"Suits her. She's pretty." Hiccup complimented, raising a hand to pat the scales on Saphira's neck. "Not every dragon is of a solid color like this. And those that are are usually the hardest to train."

Eragon kept silent as the elder man circled his dragon, taking in

every inch of her, from the ends of her claws to the very tip of her tail, with growing fascination. Saphira twisted her head around to follow him as he walked, looking uncomfortable under his scrutiny, but she did not object. After all, he was looking upon her with favor, and Eragon knew from experience her vanity could sometimes stretch across Du Weldenvarden to the Beors and back with plenty to spare.

In contrast, Toothless growled enviously and pointedly turned his back. Absently, Eragon reached out to scratch him between the ears, which seemed to please him a little. When Hiccup finished his inspection, he reached up to pat Saphira's snout again, "You're as lovely as your name is, Saphira."

\_I like him\_. Saphira said simply, showing her teeth in a funny smile.

\_Of course you do.\_ Eragon scowled back.

Then Toothless bounded between Hiccup and Saphira, pushing his rider back and growling. "And you're pouting." Hiccup teased. His dragon snarled and turned away stubbornly. "You big baby."

"You said there are different kinds of dragons in your land." Eragon said. "So what is yours?"

"\_Nott Mo\_\_Ã°\_\_r\_." Hiccup answered. "A Night Fury, one of the fiercest and most powerful dragons in the Archipelago."

Eragon believed it, but Toothless still kept his head turned away angrily. Hiccup sighed and skirted his dragon to look him in the eye, which was easier said than done since Toothless kept circling to turn away. "Come on. You can't ignore me forever." It seemed to Eragon Toothless very well could ignore his rider forever. He refused to look at him and even stomped on his only foot.

"Fine, be that way. Oh, right!" Carefully, Hiccup withdrew the purple dragon egg from his satchel and handed it to Eragon. "This is yours then, and I wish you the best of luck finding a home for them."

"Why did you steal it in the first place?"

"I panicked." Hiccup admitted uncomfortably. "I wasn't expecting to find an abandoned ship full of dragon eggs, and...well, it was the one thing I could think of."

"That's right," Eragon remembered, handing the dragon book back to him. "You said earlier that sentries spotted my ship, but I don't recall seeing anyone." \_Or detecting the presence of anyone else's minds.\_

Hiccup laughed. "Do you think I'm the only dragon rider on Berk?"

As if in response to his query, a screech sounded above them and a dark shadow swooped over the clearing. All four of them jumped in alarm, turning their eyes skyward as another dragon hovered above the tree line, then began to lower itself into the clearing. This dragon had only two hind legs, and resembled a large, reptilian pheasant. A woman with pale blond hair knotted into a complex braid dismounted before her dragon even landed, dropping a good five feet to the

ground, then ran to Hiccup.

"We've been looking everywhere for you!" She cried, gripping an axe in one hand and waving about the other. "Did you know you've been gone for almost an hour? And who is this?" Now holding the axe in both hands, she turned to face Eragon and Saphira. "Are these the two you were fighting earlier when you crashed?"

"You saw that?"

"Everyone saw it!" She shouted, pointing to the east. "You live a quarter mile that way! And you're not exactly hard to miss!"

Beside him, Saphira released a low, throaty laugh. Hiccup's mate is quite excitable, isn't she.

Despite himself, Eragon shared her amusement. The other two riders turned to him with a questioning stare, so he translated, "Saphira thinks your mate is rather humorous."

Infuriated, the woman took a step toward him and raised her axe and probably would've used it if Hiccup hadn't moved to stand at the center of the three dragon/rider pairs. "Uh...Astrid and Stormfly, Eragon and Saphira. Eragon and Saphira, Astrid and Stormfly."

Stormfly cautiously took a step forward and sniffed the end of Saphira's tail, then squawked and backtracked when the blue dragon caught on to what she was doing. Astrid didn't respond, though her blue eyes darted back and forth between her clansman and Eragon, which made her look more than a little confused. "Um â€| okay? Saphira's the dragon, right? And dragon's don't..."

"I'll explain later." Hiccup assured her, climbing onto Toothless' back. "But Eragon is the captain of the ship Fishlegs saw earlier."

"You mean the one Snotlout, and the Twins 'sailed' into the harbor?" Astrid pulled herself onto Stormfly as she spoke.

Something in her tone told Eragon she had serious doubts in the aforementioned trio. "Is the ship intact?" He asked. "More importantly, is the cargo safe?"

"Well, they didn't sink it." Astrid admitted.

Oh, that inspires confidence. Eragon remarked to Saphira. She said nothing.

"We'd better head back and sort this out." Hiccup sighed, then turned to Eragon. "You coming?"

Eragon hastily climbed onto Saphira's back and all three riders took off, soaring above the trees and heading for a small village less than a quarter mile from their location. By now, the sun had set, casting a warm, orange glow over the world. As they caught the light, Toothless' black scales glowed like fire coals. Stormfly flew alongside him, her scales a warm blue tinted with orange as they reflected the sun.

"Mate! What in Helheim is that supposed to mean?" Astrid demanded, then she twisted her saddle to shout at Saphira or Eragon; he wasn't sure which. "I'm not an animal!"

"Just let it go." Hiccup pleaded, then dropped his head with a groan, "Oh, man."

"What's wrong?" Eragon asked.

"Nothing, it just occurred to me what my dad's gonna have to say about this."

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\*\*AlagaËsian Brightscales\*\*

Color: Various

Size: Never truly stops growing

Defenses: Breathes fire, talons

Egg Incubation: See below

Notable Qualities: Fiercely loyal to his or her Rider, exceptional air combatant, suited for war, enjoys flattery

Brightscales are true to their name and come in all colors and shades with hides that shine like gemstones. Originating from the distant land of AlagaËsia, this species of dragon was almost hunted to extinction by the evil king Galbatorix. One unique factor about this species is it chooses when to hatch. If raised in the wild, it hatches when there is an abundance of food, but if it comes into contact with humans, it will hatch for one it chooses to be its rider.

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Author's Notes: Written for my sister, Scordatura, to celebrate her completion of sophomore year of high school. Way to go, kid! Two years left! Hope you like your special one-shot.

Also, this fic was written because I wanted to think about what would happen if these two got into a fight. I've never written for Eragon before, so this didn't turn out as well as I'd hoped, but I think it's okay.

And for the rest of us, only seven days until How to Train Your Dragon 2 comes to theaters! Or, you know, the rest of it aside from the approximate 15.43 minutes that's already on the internet. No, seriously, I counted.

Review and favorite if you liked it!

Disclaimer: I don't own How to Train Your Dragon or the Inheritance Cycle.

Here's the requested continuation of Bond. Thank you to everyone who reviewed, followed, and favorited.

And to Guest to clear up some confusion: Eragon saw Toothless' memories is because Toothless wasn't intentionally blocking him at all. Hiccup and Toothless don't fight with their minds and therefore haven't trained to block Eragon's probing. Toothless' memories of Hiccup were apparent because that's what he was thinking of: protecting his rider and the reasons why. If Eragon had thought to probe Hiccup's mind, he probably would've found similar memories of Toothless.

The second complaint: This one kinda confused me. Could you be more specific?

As for the spell the dragon mothers placed on the eggs, I honestly completely forgot about that. It's been a long time since I read Brisingr and Inheritance and I remember very little from either of them. So I apologize for any other confusing inaccuracies and blaring mistakes I may have and probably will continue to make.

Hope this helped. Thank you for your constructive criticism.

And special thanks to Tala White 12, RunWithScissors, TheSealer, dracologistmaster, dragonninja20, Z, Holy Nephilim, and my sister Scordatura for requesting a continuation and to historiafan8763 and the two Guests for simply reviewing. You all made this happen.

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## Chapter 2

Hiccup felt a vein twitch in his forehead, heralding a minor but throbbing headache as he stood on the docks of his village, surveying the damage before him. Frankly speaking, he might've been more surprised if they had successfully sailed the longboat safely into the harbor. "You know, Snotlout!" He called across the water. "You used to tease me mercilessly when we were kids because I was a horrible sailor."

"Be quiet!" His cousin shouted back, clinging to the mast and shaking an angry finger at Hiccup as though in accusation. "I wasn't speaking to you! Can't you two get this canoe turned around?"

"Hey, don't blame us!" Tuffnut retorted, caught between his sister and pile of crates that had toppled over in the presumed collision. "You're the one who steered us into the rocks!"

"Only because they didn't move out of my way!" Snotlout turned his nose in the air with an indignant huff, then began shouting orders for Hookfang to rescue him. As usual, the Monstrous Nightmare ignored him, sprawled out on the shore line and lazily dipping his tail in the water, pretending not to hear his rider. Likewise, Barf and Belch were contently munching their way through an unattended basket of fish.

"Oh, boy." In that moment, Hiccup couldn't decide which was more funny: the frantic efforts of Snotlout and the Twins, Eragon Shadeslayer's horrified face, or Stoick the Vast's dubious expression

as he took in the sight. Beside him, Astrid hooked her arm around his and buried her face in his shoulder to hide her laughter while Toothless shared a similar reaction, albeit he was rolling around in hysterics on the quay.

During their return flight, Hiccup had rehearsed a myriad of explanations in his head, yet none of them seemed plausible enough to win his father's favor. Not that he really thought he had a chance of getting Stoick's attention in the first place. At the very least, Saphira would probably get impatient, roar, and demand silence in that fashion, which really wasn't the best method Hiccup could imagine. It was luck Berk's chieftain happened to be at the docks when they landed, already investigating the discord. Hiccup chewed his lower lip as his father surveyed the by now almost capsized ship before them, looked at Eragon, turned to him, focused back on the ship, then, without a word, walked away, shaking his head.

"Okay, I guess I'll handle this one." Hiccup called after him, slightly relieved but a little uneasy about the repercussions sure to come. "No problem! Don't worry, I am so â€¦ so â€¦" He gave up and turned to Astrid. "We need to get those eggs out of the hold."

She cleared her throat, fighting a grin, "Right."

"No need." All three of them, and their respective dragons, spun around to find Fishlegs and Meatlug behind them, depositing one of the containers Hiccup had seen earlier into an orderly pile on the dock. "As soon as I saw they were going to hit the rocks, Meatlug and I ferried them out. They're all safe."

"All of them?" Eragon cried, taking in the sizable pile of cargo beside the pair. "Are you certain?"

Fishlegs nodded and pounded a fist against the crate he'd just dropped off. "This was the last one."

"Thanks, Fishlegs." Hiccup nodded appreciatively, glad at least some of his headache had abated. Turning back to the ship, he asked aloud, "Now â€¦ how do we deal with this?"

"Don't know, but I gotta admit," Astrid let her grin return to her face and leaned against his shoulder. "Seeing Snotlout going down with his ship is striking a chord."

Hiccup turned to see if Eragon had any suggestions, only to find him looking over the rescued eggs, placing his hand over each and everyone of them, like a worried father calming his children. He lingered over the golden spheres the longest, though whatever those were, Hiccup could not say. Perhaps another kind of dragon egg? Behind the foreign rider, however, Fishlegs was already making friends with Saphira, the palm of his hand on her snout as he'd done earlier.

She was, by far, the most beautiful dragon Hiccup had ever come across. Granted, Berk had its fair share of attractive species, but all of them lacked the grace and nobility Saphira seemed to emanate. He knew he wasn't the only one to think so either, for a line of his clansmen had gathered on the wooden scaffolds leading up the cliffside and into the village.

That or they'd come to gawk at the disaster the Twins and Snotlout had made of Eragon's ship. It was completely capsized now, and the three were now sitting atop it, despondently holding their knees and staring at the water like a trio of marooned sailors. Then Snotlout let out a sudden shout of rage and frustration and shoved Tuffnut into the water.

"Well, this is a fine mess if I ever saw it."

"Hey, Gobber." Hiccup waved as the smith made his way toward them, skirting a Terror sunning herself on the quay, then again made the official introductions to everyone present. "Everyone, this is Eragon Shadeslayer and his dragon Saphira Bjartskular. Eragon, my old mentor Gobber, that's Fishlegs Ingerman, and the Gronckle is Meatlug. And those three out there...somewhere," He continued, waving a hand in the direction of the ship, just about submerged now. "Are Snotlout Jorgenson and the Thorston twins Ruffnut and Tuffnut. And their dragons Hookfang, Barf, and Belch."

Eragon nodded, probably at a loss for words.

"Hey!" Snotlout called across the water. "When you're done standing around, can you get us out of here!"

"What do you think?" Hiccup asked everyone else.

"Can they swim?" Astrid replied with a smug smile.

"Taught them myself." Gobber nodded, as Tuffnut suddenly resurfaced. "By threatening to kill them no less. Works every time."

Hiccup frowned, just then noticing how long the male twin had been underwater. Tuffnut raised a fist in triumph, clutching what appeared to be a small horse carved out of wood with wheels in the hooves. "I found it!"

"Hey, cool!" His sister cried, leaning forward. "We haven't seen that in years! Give it here!"

"Come get it!"

"I will!" Ruff retorted, rising to her feet and diving into the water after her brother where the pair proceeded to...actually, Hiccup wasn't entirely sure what they were trying to do this time. Drown each other, maybe? It certainly wouldn't be the first time. Having no interest in witnessing a homicide, he spun around to face the others on the dock. "All right, uh, Astrid, you deal with this and I'llâ€" "

"Now you're passing the problem on to \_me\_?"

Hiccup shook his head, holding his hands up to gesture, "No, I am splitting the problem into three groups. You're in charge of the ship and I'll figure out what to do with Saphira and her rider."

"What's the third part?" Astrid demanded, crossing her arms and glaring at him.

"It was getting the eggs out of the hold and finding a place where they won't be damaged." Hiccup explained calmly. Toothless nudged him

to the side, playfully nipping at his sleeve. "And I'm giving that job to Fishlegs."

"So I get the sharp end of the sword why?"

"I'm sorry, I didn't know you wanted to discuss the Alagaësian's fate with my bull-headed father."

Astrid promptly whirled around, shouting up at their clansmen lined on the scaffold. "I need half a dozen men down here to assemble a pulley! Don't keep me waiting!"

"That's my girl." Hiccup grinned and turned to Eragon. The younger man was still hovering over the eggs and spheres, his lips moving soundlessly as he worked. Every so often he would turn to Saphira and the two of them would discuss something he would not hear even if he'd been right beside them. Hiccup tilted his head to the side and frowned. Like his dragon, Eragon himself was interesting. Estimating him to be about sixteen or seventeen years old, Hiccup observed he moved with a certain grace no one on Berk came close to possessing. Almost inhuman really. And his eyes matched those of his father's and the other elders of Berk as well as their more wizened enemies. The eyes of men who'd seen war and who had beyond question participated in it.

Whoever Eragon was, the road from which he'd come had not been a smooth one.

It was certainly evident in his skill with a blade. Gripping his left shoulder, he thought back to the previous events. His sword arm ached from the end of his wrist to where his arm met his shoulder, and even into his torso if he moved it wrong. That first time Eragon struck him and Hiccup block, he thought he was going to dislocate his arm. The sheer strength of the man dismayed him. Eragon was roughly a couple finger lengths shorter than he was and shared a similar, lean build, yet fighting him was like sparring with Gobber or his father, except four times as bad!

Narrowing his dark green eyes, Hiccup watched as Eragon knelt over the last crate Fishlegs had set on the dock. His ears were pointed, like an elf, but that was impossible. Elves, dwarves, and giants were all just a story for children. They didn't actually exist. But Eragon claims they do. Hiccup thought, feeling uneasy. And he looks like one from the old stories himself. Is it possible—

"Hiccup?" He jumped and whirled around as Astrid gently placed a hand on his shoulder. "Are you all right?"

"Yeah, I'm fine." Hiccup nodded, turning to face her. "Think you can get the ship out of the water?"

"Gobber says not tonight, but if we hurry, we can get the pulley set up before it gets too dark."

Hiccup nodded again, surveyed the docks again, then swung himself onto his dragon's back. "Shadeslayer." The man turned. "You'll stay here with Fishlegs. He'll find a safe place to store the eggs and get you and Saphira settled in our stables."

At that, Saphira swung her great head around and fixed him with an



intense sapphire blue eye. \_A dragon does not sleep in a mere horse's stable.\_ She snarled.

"The term sounds worse than it is, Saphira." He reassured her, patting her nose. "We have no horses on Berk, and the stables are custom made for dragons. You'll be very comfortable there."

She snorted, but no more words came and she turned back to Eragon, who nodded thankfully. "You have my utmost gratitude."

\_He's polite as a woman.\_ Hiccup speculated, raising an eyebrow, then turned to overlook the quay again. Half the Jorgensons had arrived, along with Bucket and Mulch, bringing with them their tools and a pair of sturgeons, which he hoped they intended for supper and not building the pulley. Snotlout was knee deep in water before he finally took a deep breath and swam to shore, where his father yanked him out and began furiously reprimanding him for crashing a ship. Hiccup winced, hoping Spitelout wouldn't be too hard on him. After all, it was probably fifty percent the Twins fault, too. Speaking of, neither of them were in the water anymore, but after briefly scanning the area, he found them on the dock, playing with their long-lost toy like children half their age.

Toothless rumbled low in his throat, looking back at him in question. "Yeah, let's go." The black dragon snorted in agreement, bunching his sturdy legs beneath him before launching himself skyward. A cold breath of air blasted Hiccup in the face and he reached up to pull down the visor of his helmet, only to remember he'd lost it when he'd crashed earlier. \_I'll have to go back and look for it when I have the chance.\_

The sun had set over the Sinister Sea's horizon by now, and the sky had blackened to a deep amber. Only a few of his clansmen were still in the village as almost everyone had gone down to the docks to view the events there or otherwise returning from the fields. Given any other day, Hiccup could see them in the distance, but right now, he chose to keep his head down and concentrate on ignoring the cold and maneuvering his friend's artificial tail.

He still had no idea how it had just shattered like that. As a rule, he checked the tail for damage every morning after breakfast: kinks in the connecting rod, fraying cables, tears in the tail itself, and so on. But this morning, he'd found nothing short of a perfectly working tail, and yet it had torn apart like a fish in a dragon's mouth. \_I supposed it could have happened in the fight easily enough, but wouldn't I remember something like that?\_ As it was rather crucial to their survival in aerial combat, Hiccup preferred to keep a close eye on the tail in case of accidents like that.

Maybe he would search for the broken parts when he went back for the helmet, he thought as Toothless dropped onto the hardened earth outside their house.

Skullcrusher was contentedly napping by the door when they landed, though he temporarily opened one bright eye when Hiccup dismounted. "Evening." He greeted. The dragon snorted and turned his head away. Toothless growled at that, but he decided not to make an issue and bounded through the open doorway. A series of crashing and thudding could be heard, followed by a familiar yell of surprise.

Hiccup grinned and crossed over the threshold himself. "Everything all right, Dad?" It was Toothless who answered, bounding happily over the floorboards with a roasted fish dangling from his jaws.

Behind him at the table, Stoick the Vast was less amused by the black dragon's behavior, especially not after Toothless swallowed the fish in two gulps and made his uncanny imitation of human laughter. He sighed and pushed his empty plate away, resigning himself to a bowl of stew, "You owe me a fish, dragon. Hiccup, take a seat. And shut the door before that Terror gets in here. I don't like the way he's looking at my dinner either."

Hiccup turned to frown at the little, sky blue Terror that had snuck up behind his heels, gurgling plaintively at him. "Go find Gothi. She'll give you something to eat." The dragon cocked his head to the side for an instant, then scampered away in search of the wise woman. Shaking his head, Hiccup shut the door and resigned himself to the gloom of the house. "So..."

"I see you've made a new friend."

Right to the point then. Taking a deep breath, Hiccup took a seat at the table and snatched up one of the crab cakes Mrs. Ingerman had brought over that morning, broke it in two, and took a bite from the smaller half. It was cold, he determined distractedly, but it was still tasty.

"Tell me what happened." Stoick said dryly.

It took almost a quarter hour to explain the occurrences of that morning, starting with when he'd set out looking for the ship and how he'd found it packed with dragon eggs from a species he didn't recognize. Admitting to taking one of the eggs was difficult as the idea was ridiculous in retrospect and, try as he might, he had no idea what was going through his head at the time. It wasn't like him to just act without thinking like that.

Stoick listened without a word, yet as Hiccup described the scuffle between him and Eragon, he noticed a slight narrowing in the man's eyes. He continued on, describing how the two of them had managed to reach an understanding and ceased fighting. "And then Astrid showed up, I came back here, and you know the rest."

"Were you hurt?" Stoick asked once he'd completed his narration.

"Not badly." Hiccup lied. Now that all the excitement had died down and he'd had a chance to catch his breath, he found that, in addition to his sore arm, the space between his shoulders was killing him and now there was an insistent throbbing in the arm Eragon had twisted behind his back. Frowning a little, he rolled his shoulder experimentally, then clenched his jaw as a wave of pain spread from the base of his neck to just below his right shoulder blade.

He could tell from his father's face he was fooling no one, but Stoick made no comment and asked, "Well, now that you've brought the rider here, what do you intend to do with him?"

"Well...uh, I had thought to help repair the shipâ€"

"And why, Hiccup, should the people of Berk concern themselves with the troubles of a foreigner?" The chieftain asked, fixing him with a grave stare and pointing at him with the wooden spoon he'd been using.

Hiccup froze. Was there something wrong with helping Eragon? He didn't see why not. His father was never against lending a helping hand to those who needed it, like Heather and Thornado's wounded friend. His people weren't particularly hostile to strangers in the first place, or at least didn't start conflicts. Seriously, looking back on his childhood, Berk was rarely the aggressor in any altercations that occurred between the tribes in the Archipelago.

\_So why...?\_ \_He's testing me!\_ He realized with a start. \_This is a decision I will have to make some day and he's trying to prepare me for it.\_ Swallowing his unease, he began haltingly. "Because...Eragon hasn't given us, the people of Berk, a reason to deny him our help. However, he has an entire ship filled with dragon eggs, which could be a potential threat. We could confiscate the eggs, of course, but we run the risk alienating him even further, since he reacted quite violently when I stole one egg earlier. Not that one man could take on an entire village by himself, even with a dragon, but it isn't worth the risk given what we know. So by doing this favor, we'd be extending a hand of friendship and forming a possible alliance in the future."

"Very good, son."

Laughed nervously in spite of himself, Hiccup answered. "That and it \_is\_ sorta the Twins and Snotlout's fault the ship's a wreck in the first place, so not repairing it would be rude."

"Hm, true enough." Stoick nodded in agreement, then stated abruptly. "However, since this was your call, I'm leaving them in your hands."

Hiccup felt a chunk of crab cake get stuck in his throat and he coughed, "What?"

"It's only natural you personally deal with the mess you made." Setting the spoon aside, the man rose from the table. "Go pay Gothi a visit so she can take care of your shoulder. As for me, I'm heading down to the docks to meet this Eragon Shadeslayer myself."

Hiccup sighed. "Sure thing, Dad."

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**\*\*Important Announcement!\*\*** Since this was originally just supposed to be a one-shot, I never really gave much thought to developing an actual story, so as of right now there is no conflict or antagonist. Who would \_you\_ like to make an appearance in Bond? Alvin? Dagur? Daenerys Stormborn? No, just kidding! One crossover at a time!

Let me know what you think.

I don't own How to Train Your Dragon, the Inheritance Cycle, or Game of Thrones.

### 3. Chapter 3

#### Bond: Chapter 3

\_I wonder if this was how Vroengard was.\_ Eragon mused as he was lugging the last of the crates into the Nest. A pair of dragons—Deadly Nadders, he remembered—darted past him and Saphira, squawking at each other as they disappeared into one of the alcoves in the Dragon Nest. \_Not just the command post of the riders but a home and safe haven for dragons as this island is.\_ Everywhere he looked, he could see dragons: sprawled lazily across the floor with their tongues lolling, neatly perched on roosts, curled up in their respective nooks. Here and there, he glimpsed humans among them, mostly children nestling together with their partners in flight and the occasional adult treating their dragon with some last minute attention before turning in.

Saphira crept past Eragon and wriggled through an open door deep in the Nest. Under Fishlegs' instructions, they'd been placing the crates in the large chamber set aside for dragon mothers and their eggs. It was empty now, Hiccup's friend, Fishlegs, had explained, because the breeding season wouldn't start until the winter months. Eragon also asked why the dragon nursery was lined with metal but was either not heard or outright ignored.

He did, however, receive an answer when he asked if it was healthy for the hatchlings to raise them in a dark, windowless chamber like a prison. "Good Thor, no!" Fishlegs had cried. "No, we only keep them in here to protect them and the mothers from the elements because the eggs of most dragon species hatch during the winter. They used to migrate to a warmer island to have their babies, but in recent years, they've stopped doing that. When they hatch, we move them out to the Cove where Hiccup first bonded with Toothless."

"Still, wouldn't they be better off in your own homes?"

"No," Fishlegs said matter-of-factly. "The eggs hatch by exploding spontaneously."

Eragon still wasn't sure if he ought to believe him, but he'd continued transporting the eggs to the nursery. Saphira didn't seem particularly bothered by the arrangement, just as long as they were dry and safe, although she did snarl occasionally as Snotlout or the Twins handled the crates too roughly. She was infinitely grateful to Fishlegs for rescuing the eggs, Eragon could tell through their link, and she seemed to be quickly becoming friends with the other rider's dragon. Even now, he could sense them sitting together in the nursery, sending a series of mental pictures back and forth between one another.

"So is Saphira really the last of her kind like Hiccup says?" The islander called Fishlegs asked as he struggled with the heavy cargo. Behind him, the woman Hiccup had left in charge of drawing out the sunken ship quickened her pace, watching Eragon expectantly for an answer.

Eragon shook his head, pretending to struggle under the weight of the cargo so as not to arouse suspicion of his inhuman strength. "No, there are two others in my homeland, both males. And we're hoping to

rebuild her race with all the eggs you see here."

"Are they \_all\_ hers?" Fishlegs asked in disbelief.

"What? No!" Eragon shuddered. "No, in fact, none of them are."

"Didn't think so." The Viking nodded as the group crossed into the Dragon Nest. "You had me worried there. But are some of them hers at least? You said there were two male dragons, so she had to have mated with one of them at some point."

\_I can hear you.\_ Saphira snapped behind them, then turned to snarl at the Twins for nearly dropping a crate.

"Oh, sorry!" Fishlegs whirled around to speak to her directly. "I completely forgot you can talk, Saphira! You see, Berk dragons don't speak, as you might have noticed, soâ€¦"

As he continued begging Saphira's forgiveness, Eragon returned his mind to how much it puzzled him the dragons on this island had no comprehensible language. They certainly seemed intelligent enough, yet whenever he reached out with his mind to touch one's thoughts, all he saw were mental images of his memories and other obscure clues to their thoughts.

Then he remembered what Glaedr had told him of the wild dragons of Alagãesia, who spoke no language and communicated only by pictures, smells, and other senses. \_Perhaps this is the case with Toothless and the others. They don't speak because they've never learned a language to speak, nor do they have an interest in human speech.\_

"Hiccup!" Fishlegs suddenly called in greeting. "Chief!"

Eragon turned and jumped at the sight of Hiccup and the red-bearded man who'd left the docks earlier, who was by far one of the tallest men he'd ever seen. Taller than Horst even and undoubtedly just as strong.

\_Another head taller,\_ He remarked to Saphira. \_And that man would be the height of small Kull.\_

\_With that helmet,\_ She replied. \_I almost thought he was a Kull.\_

Eragon stifled his amusement as the pair entered Berk's dragon stable.

"This is Eragon Shadeslayer and his dragon Saphira." Hiccup announced when they reached them. "Eragon and Saphira, my chieftain and father, Stoick the Vast."

Eragon frowned without really meaning to, glancing back and forth between the pair in front of him, and even Saphira snorted in disbelief. Never before had he seen such a stark contrast between father and son. If one looked closely enough in Carvahall, it was easy to see the existing likenesses among families, whether it was parents, their children, or their siblings. But here he saw absolutely no similarities between Hiccup and Stoick, except perhaps

their dark green eyes.

\_If Hiccup had been born a female\_, Saphira remarked to him in private. \_We probably would have no difficulties at all seeing what his late mother looked like.\_

Agreeing with her in silence, Eragon briefly wondered if he bore any resemblance to his own mother, Selena and found himself wishing he'd had the wisdom to ask Murtagh what she'd been like, if he remembered at all. Respectfully, he bowed his head to Berk's chieftain. "Thank you for receiving us, and I apologize for the inconveniences we must have caused."

"Think nothing of it." Was the reply. "Actually, you'll have to forgive me for not speaking with you sooner, but I was curious to see how my son would react in such a situation."

Behind his father, Hiccup twitched somewhat, a sudden movement Eragon might've missed if not for his inhuman eyes. \_If he is the chieftain's son, then that certainly explains the level of authority Hiccup has over everyone here.\_ He'd been wondering why everyone followed his command so quickly, especially with how young he was.

"Now then." Said Berk's chieftain, looking around the main atrium of the dragon nest where Eragon and the others had begun to store the eggs and Eldunar's. "From what I hear, the cargo of your ship is orphaned dragon eggs. I'd like you to tell me what you plan to do with them."

"You said you were trying to find a place to hatch and raise them, right?" Hiccup asked, putting a hand over one of the crates and knocking his knuckles into the woodwork. "Because there was no place for them in your homeland."

"Right." Eragon nodded, addressing everyone in the Nest. "You see, in my homeland..." As he had earlier with Hiccup, Eragon recounted his adventures in Alagaësia, albeit now he told a more detailed version so as to clear up any suspicions this Stoick the Vast may have. Everyone in the Nest was intently focused, even Hiccup although he'd already heard the story. In fact, Eragon noticed him removing a small notebook from somewhere in his armor and began writing like a madman, filling in and flipping pages faster than Eragon ever thought possible.

He paraphrased Galbatorix's downfall by describing how he'd stabbed the mad king with Brisingr, omitting the use of magic entirely, then again explained how he and Saphira needed a safe place where they could train new Riders and restore the race of dragons. \_If there's no magic in these lands, I'm not so sure if it's a good idea to expose these people to it, or to even alert them of its existence.\_ "That's what we were looking for when...well, you know the rest."

"So not just Shadeslayer but Kingkiller as well." One of the two women stated, then leaned over to look at whatever Hiccup was writing. A moment later, she pointed at something on the page and asked a question Eragon didn't catch.

"That's quite a story." Chief Stoick said.

Eragon smiled to himself, thinking of how Brom had once scolded him not to refer to the past as mere stories, then again bowed his head respectfully. "We will continue our journey as soon as I have my ship repaired. Payment wouldn't be a problem if that's a concern."

"Payment?" Fishlegs frowned. "You mean with coin as they do in the South?"

"Or something of equal value to you." Eragon amended, assuming the people of this Archipelago conducted trade through a bartering system.

"That's enough." Stoick interrupted, holding up a massive hand. "We'll discuss this when your ship is repaired. For now, Hiccup."

"Yes?"

"Treat Shadeslayer as you would any peaceable visitor from another island. With our treaty signing with the Berserker Tribe coming up, this will be a good time to...ah, prepare."

Only Eragon seemed to notice Hiccup glower at his father, if only for a moment before he tucked away his notebook and scratched his dragon behind the ears. "Sure thing, Dad." He answered in a tight voice. Eragon frowned, sensing something of a strained relationship, then glanced at Saphira for her opinion. She did not attend, snapping her head around to bite at a pair of small dragons nipping at her tail. Clearing his throat and wearing an amiable smile, Hiccup stepped forward, addressing the entirety of the group. "Well, shall we finish transferring those eggs?"

Even with the help of more dragonriders, by the time they'd finished moving of the eggs and the EldunarÃ-, the sky had gone completely black save for the bright full moon illuminating the island. The Twins had flopped onto the floor, snoring obnoxiously alongside their green, two-headed dragon. Nearby, the Monstrous Nightmare lay breathing heavily with exhaustion, his rider scratching his head. "There, now, take it easy, Hookfang. Don't want you getting sick again, do we. Go to sleep."

"So what's a Shade?" A voice interrupted his thoughts.

"Hm?" Eragon turned his head to meet the clear blue eyes of the woman who'd come looking for Hiccup earlier that evening, after their fight had ended. Astrid, he remembered her name, was standing several paces away, watching him through a fringe of hair draped over her left eye. As soon as she'd ensured his sunken ship would be brought up, she'd begun helping transport the crates, effortlessly taking two at a time with Stormfly. "A Shade?"

"Yeah. When Hiccup introduced you to everyone else, he called you Shadeslayer. You didn't earn that name for nothing. So what's a Shade?"

There was no hint of apprehension or fear in her voice when spoke to him, only a proud and reserved confidence that reminded him somewhat of Nasuada. Except Astrid was much more prone to violence than his

liege lord had ever been. The double-headed axe she carried in plain view, and the way she'd seemed ready to use it against him earlier, assured him of that. Was she a warrior, he wondered. She wore armor, as did the other young woman, Ruffnut, and carried a weapon, but it was strange to imagine human women fighting in battles alongside men as the elves did in his Alagãesia.

"Shades are monsters in my homeland. They're humans who traded everything they have for strength and power, and they exist to spread fear and cause pain and destruction." It wasn't the most accurate description he could imagine, but it seemed to satisfy Hiccup's mate. \_Great, now I'm saying it! What next? \_ Astrid turned away with a thoughtful nod, patting her dragon's nose and sending her toward one of the alcoves to settle down to sleep. Shaking his head, Eragon turned to several of the crates containing EldunarÃ- and reached out with his mind, \_Glaedr, are you there?\_

\_I am. \_The ancient dragon answered sourly. \_And I still don't agree with our course of action on this island.\_

\_I know, but what choice do we have? \_Eragon asked. \_I don't want to expose the people of Berk to magic, so I can't repair the ship. And even if I could, it would require a great amount of energy from myself, Saphira, and all the EldunarÃ-. Besides, no one has shown any intention doing us harm and without the use of magic what they can do is limited.\_

\_All the same, exert some caution. \_Glaedr warned. \_The last thing I want to send us into the void is carelessness.\_

"Eragon?" Eragon snapped out of his mind and turned to find Hiccup standing beside him, watching him with a puzzled face. Behind him, Toothless shared a similar expression. "Is everything all right?"

"Yes, thank you." Eragon answered. "Did you need something, Hiccup?"

The older man extended his hand, clutching a small loaf of bread with a wedge of cheese. "I thought you might be hungry. I would've brought something for Saphira, too, but I don't know what she eats. Most dragons on Berk eat fish, but there've been exceptions."

\_I've never tried fish. \_Saphira told him, lowering her muzzle curiously.

"I'll be sure to bring you a basket, then." Hiccup smiled, then turned his attention to Eragon. "Before you turn in, I just wanted to apologize for the trouble I've caused you."

"I understand. Were our situations reversed I'd have done the same. And I apologize for attacking you earlier."

Saphira made her amends as well, murmuring regretfully, \_I wish I'd not been so hasty to attack one of my own kind.\_ Toothless approached her then, raised his adder-like head, and licked at the scratches he'd inflicted on her muzzle. Hiccup patted his dragon's head with a fond smile, then recoiled as Saphira suddenly focused on him, touching her snout to his forehead. \_Thank you for your kindness\_. She told him, then pulled away.



"I think I'm finally getting used to you talking." Hiccup remarked, though in good nature as he pulled himself onto Toothless. "Have a good night, you two."

"Good night." Eragon replied as the pair flew out of the Nest and not even his inhuman eyes could pick them out in the black.

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Dawn found Hiccup in the wreckage of the forest looking for his helmet. "We really did a number on this place, didn't we, bud?" Beside him, Toothless was nosing at a dark space under a rock, utterly fascinated by his discovery, whatever it was. Or at least pretending to be fascinated so as to avoid looking embarrassed over the damage.

Hiccup crossed his arms and frowned. \_I fell about there. \_He thought, nodding to his left, then took note of a sizable rift in the dirt where the grass had been pulled up. \_And that's where Toothless landed. So my helmet probably wentâ€¦| \_Tracing the edge of the clearing, he kept a sharp eye on the tall grass. Behind him, Toothless continued his inspection of the area, pawing at the dirt.

A juvenile Typhoomerang burst out of the tall grass, and Hiccup nearly leaped three feet off the ground, but the little dragon took no notice, preoccupied with his hatch mate chasing him. Letting out a breath of air, Hiccup turned back to the undergrowth and swept aside a patch of ferns. "There it is!" He shouted in triumph, sweeping the elusive helm off the ground and holding it in both hands to inspect it for damage. A large dent had marred the crown just above the left eye, but it was nothing a few minutes in Gobber's forge wouldn't fix. Smiling in satisfaction, he tucked it into his satchel and turned to call for Toothless, only to find the black dragon had vanished. "Toothless?"

There was no sign of him, save for the mass damage he and Saphira Brightscales had caused yesterday. The trunk of a once mighty conifer had been snapped in its middle, the bark splintering at the break and its needles already brown and dead. He would have to let Gobber know to start with this tree when repairing Eragon's ship. Other signs of the battle became evident: talon and scorch marks blemishing other trees and unfortunate boulders, charred brush, a large gouge in the earth not unlike the one from Toothless' crash landing so long ago. A pang of guilt swept through him, yet he chose to ignore it and tapped his prosthetic against a blackened rock. \_An eye for an eye, they say. \_"Toothless!"

This time, his call was answered as his friend came charging through a patch of brambles and came to a halt before him, his snout inches from Hiccup's nose and his mouth set in an awkward smile as he worked something in his jaw. "What do you have there?" Hiccup asked, holding his hands out and cringing as the dragon dropped the saliva drenched remains of his artificial tail. "Right. Your tail." Toothless made a rumbling noise low in his throat, happily nudging his head. "Good boy." He grinned and twirled the wrecked fabric and rods in his hand and was just about to drop it when something caught his eye.

Hiccup frowned and, ignoring the smell, brought the contraption closer for a better inspection. All three of the secondary rods, the ones giving the tail its shape, had snapped in two. Of all the parts of the tail's apparatus, these regions endured the least amount of stress. Therefore, it was the last part he would expect to snap. No, not snap. The rod wasn't worn at all, not showing any signs of bending before breaking. The primary rod was one thing, but the secondaries? And all three of them, too? It looked as though someone had deliberately cut them.

But who would? no, no one could have. There wasn't a Viking in the Archipelago who could make a cut as clean as that, no matter how sharp the blade. So how did? Hiccup shook his head, all of a sudden thinking of the old stories his aunt and foster mother Freda had told him of witches and sorcery. They used to scare him, he remembered, and preferred the tales of great heroes and their victories over savage warlords and vicious monsters, which was probably the only thing him and his cousin Snotlout had in common.

There was no truth to Aunt Freda's stories, though, he told himself as he deposited the destroyed tail into a saddlebag and mounted Toothless. "No truth at all. They're only stories."

Still, the tail troubled him as he flew home. He doubted anyone had tampered with it, he would've noticed, and yet? He shook himself. "I'm thinking about it too hard."

He knew he was late and breakfast would be cold by the time he and Toothless glided over the village, for most of his tribesmen were leaving their longhouses, ready to head off to their respective trades or to work in the fields. Yet when he arrived home, he found Stoick still at the table, pondering at a sheet of parchment. "We received a message this morning." His father announced in a resigned voice, holding up a scroll. Hiccup's jaw clenched at the sight of the Berserker seal. After defeating the madmen warriors three years ago, they'd kept the Isles on a tight leash, reinstating the old treaty with a few additional amendments, including the number of enemy ships they would allow into Berk's harbor.

Well, at least there won't be an armada. Hiccup sighed, pouring himself a flagon of yak milk. "What does Dagur want? The treaty signing isn't due for another three weeks at least."

"He plans to come earlier this year," Stoic explained dryly, handing the message over for Hiccup to read himself. "Seeing as winter is setting in faster than usual."

Hiccup paused, then calmly cut himself a slice of bread and a wedge of cheese and asked, "How much earlier?"

"Two or three days at the very least."

"That doesn't give us much time to prepare."

"No, it doesn't." Stoick agreed gravely.

Hiccup leaned against the wall, taking a bite of bread and glancing over the letter, though it was hard to decipher the characters through Dagur's chicken scratch penmanship. I'd say he should look into hiring a scribe, but that would mean torture for some

unfortunate soul lamenting the the day he or she learned to write.  
\_"He \_does\_ realize we have our own harvest to look into and we can't entertain them on a whim, doesn't he?"

"I have my doubts Dagur gives much thought to the Berkians at all." Stoick gave a humorless smile. "Oh, and according to that message, it appears he'll be bringing his new bride along."

Hiccup nearly spat yak milk across the table. "His \_what!\_" Stoick just gave him a perturbed nod. Taking another bite of bread, Hiccup reasoned calmly, "Well, I suppose that's to be expected. He is the Berserker chieftain, after all, and it's imperative he continues his line, butâ€¦|what woman would be crazy enough toâ€¦"oh, wait, that makes perfect sense."

Stoick smiled ruefully and raised his flagon. "To the wife of Dagur the Deranged, Lady of the Berserker Tribe, mistress of the fen, and daughter of Frigga, and may she be much more rational and sane than her lord husband."

"Hear, hear." Hiccup sighed, raising his own tankard and knocking it against his father's before taking an ample swallow. Dagur married? To who? Well, he supposed that didn't matter. Hiccup wasn't familiar with any of the Berserker women. It was rare for them to visit Berk during treaty signings and other events, though he'd often wondered why, and when they did accompany their clansmen across the sea, they were often highborn ladies, such as Dagur's elder sister, whom he'd met briefly years ago.

His father set his half empty mug back on the table. "That reminds me, Hiccup, have you spoken to Baldur yet?"

Hiccup didn't answer and took another gulp of milk.

Stoick sighed. "You know putting it off won't help."

Sensing his rider's misery, Toothless raised his head and nuzzled his arm with a low, sympathetic grumble. Hiccup rose to his feet. "I'm heading out. With Dagur coming, that can only spell trouble for Saphira and Eragon."

"Avoiding the subject isn't much use either."

"Later, Dad." Hiccup muttered, throwing open the front door, only to run into Fishlegs raising his hand to knock. "Holy Frigga!"

"Sorry, Hiccup. Morning, Chief. Listen, we'veâ€¦" "

"Walk and talk." Hiccup answered, shouldering past his friend. Grumbling worriedly, Toothless padded after him. \_Dagur showing up early, Eragon and Saphira, early winter, the harvest, I have to talk to Baldur, too many things going on at onceâ€¦|this is just likeâ€¦|likeâ€¦|dear Odin, this is what being Chief is like, isn't it? \_Hiccup dragged a hand across his face, taking a deep breath and a moment to collect his thought before turning to Fishlegs, who was running down the slope after him.

"So as I was saying," The younger rider continued, "We have a problem."

"\_You've \_got a problem?" Hiccup demanded. "Guess who's paying us a visit early this year?"

"Oh, no."

"Yes."

"You can't be serious."

"Indeed, the dragon-slaying, knife-throwing, child-drowning, armada-driving, kin-killing, deranged sociopath is back for another fun and exciting peace treaty on Berk." Hiccup threw his hands up in irritation. "Could there have been a worse time? What are we supposed to do about Eragon and Saphira?"

Fishlegs paled. "Y-You don't think Dagur would try to hurt them, do you?"

"Look at it this way, Fishlegs." Hiccup turned to face the village and the Nest, feeling sick. "If you were Dagur, a violent maniac out for bloodshed and glory, how badly would you want to kill Saphira if you heard she was the last of her kind?"

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Author's Notes: Sorry for the slow update, but this one was a bitch to write. Honestly, writer's block is the absolute worst, but I didn't want to post some crappy chapter just because I was in a hurry. Plus, I have school now and work and other hobbies. Thank you for your patience and sticking with me, and thank you to those who reviewed and followed and favorited. Hope you enjoyed. I promise I'm still alive.

Notes on the actual plot: The name of Snotlout's mother really is Freda for those of you who haven't read the books yet or have no interest in reading the books. He also has a sister named Adelaide, so she may make an appearance, too.

I don't own either of these series.

#### 4. Chapter 4

Author's Notes: Ughâ€¦fair warning, this isn't the best chapter. Since nothing exciting really happens until Dagur arrives on Berk, it's a bit of a struggle to make the story until then interesting. I did the best I could. All the same, I hope you enjoy this update, and my most profound and sincere apologize if you're disappointed. The next chapter will be much better, I promise.

Thank you all for your support.

I don't own Dragons or Inheritance.

#### Chapter 4

The sky glowed amber with the rising sun as the Berserker flagship, \_BanahÇ«gg\_, cut across the ocean like a hunter's blade through parchment. The Lady of the Berserker Isles stood at the prow of the ship, breathing in the salty sea air with a sigh of relief. With

winds and weather as fair as this, the crew had been telling her they were bound to reach Berk a day early. She hoped that was the case; she was tired of this constant seasickness.

Behind \_BanahÇ«gg\_ followed two other ships from the armada, each heavily armored despite this was supposed to be a peaceful meeting. She swallowed uneasily and pulled her shawl tighter around her shoulders. Whatever Dagur was planning, she knew it could not bode well for the Berk tribe, though for all her attempts at listening in on her husband's war councils she couldn't fathom what he was up to. It wasn't right, all this rage directed at a tribe that had once been their ally for fifty years.

"Milady," Captain Vorg announced behind her, thumping his spear onto the deck. She turned with a well-concealed scowl. She disliked the man, and wondered why her chieftain trusted him so much. "The chieftain requests your presence below deck."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, milady. He also says not to keep him waiting."

Well, if that was the case. \_What could he possibly want now?\_ She wondered, striding across the deck, her long cloak trailing after her. Dagur preferred to ignore her and have as little to do with her as a yak did with a speck of dirt, which suited her just fine. She'd never been called to him like this before.

Just as she was nearing the hatch, she suddenly heard a wailing scream overhead and turned her eyes upward in shock. A dragon? This far from land? High above, she glimpsed a pair of powerful, black wings beating the morning sky. Was that the Night Fury she'd heard Dagur rage and brood and talk to himself about for hours at a time? She'd been to Berk once several years ago and had seen the unholy offspring of lightning and death itself along with its rider firsthand. Tucking a stray strand of hair behind her ear, she backed away from the hatch, certain Dagur would have heard the Fury's call and would be coming up to investigate. That and probably rant at the rider.

As she expected, the Berserker Chieftain came charging along the galley, twirling his twisted axe around in his hands. "So, Hiccup!" He called, spitting out the name like a curse. "Come to seek me out, have you? Survey this sorry excuse for an armada?"

The Lady blocked her ears to the rest of her lord's shouting and stepped around the mast, craning her neck to see the dragon soaring around the ships, eyes wide in wonder. "Oh, myâ€¦!" The creature flew low over the water, trailing the tips of its wings through the waves and casting water onto the deck. She smiled, but the black rider only circled three more times, coasting above the wind current before his midnight dragon thrust its wings downward and propelled off toward its island home. The Berserker Lady's heart sank. She wished he would've landed. Seeing a dragon up close, especially since her husband's tribe despised them so, might have been enough to salvage the day.

Knowing better than to approach Dagur while he was in such a state, she meandered her way toward the stern and leaned against the rail, gazing back toward where the Berserker Isles had disappeared long

ago. If there was to be trouble on Berk, she wondered when she would ever see her home again.

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\_I don't really see why this is necessary.\_ Saphira was grumbling as she stood awkwardly in the center of the Dragon Academy, her wings outstretched as if in flight.

"We just want to document and record the characteristics of your species. To us, you're brand-new, and that's exciting!" Fishlegs told her, frantically drawing sketches in his notes as the Twins were running a long rope in front of the blue dragon from wingtip to wingtip. Astrid and Snotlout were doing the same with her tail to her nose.

"Eighty-five feet!" Ruffnut called out.

"One hundred here!" Astrid added.

"Got it!" Fishlegs jotted down the information. "Eighty-five foot wingspan and one hundred feet in length. Just a bit bigger than Hookfang. And she's not even fully grown! How old did you say she was?"

"About two or three years. But herâ€|.'species' never really stops growing." Eragon watched the entire procedure with a hint of amusement. The Berkians' enthusiasm oddly reminded him of the elves during his and Saphira's visit to EllesmÃ©ra, albeit much more analytical. And it wasn't just the humans. Even the various dragon breeds on Berk seemed fascinated with his dragon, often taking any opportunity they could to sniff at her tail or wings. \_I wonder what it is about her the Berk dragons so interesting. Can they sense she has magic?\_ So far as he'd seen, there didn't seem to be any indication these creatures possessed any special power. But why?

Why were the AlagÃ©esian dragons different in that respect? And the humans for that matter.

"By the way," Tuffnut called, interrupting his thoughts. "Doesn't Hiccup usually do this?"

"Where is he anyway?" His sister piled on, helping her brother wind up the knotted measuring rope.

Astrid dropped her measuring rope into a pile by Fishlegs. "He and Toothless are out looking for the Berserker ships. Something about wanting to see how close they were."

Eragon felt a twinge of unease. Ever since Hiccup had told him about this Dagur the Deranged, Saphira and the \_EldunarÃ- had been itching to leave Berk as soon as possible. It didn't matter the incoming chieftain was no Dragon Rider or even a sorcerer. None of them were in any hurry to come in contact with a madman dragon hunter. It was only by reassuring them that, without magic, he wouldn't be able to harm the eggs Eragon had been able to quell their concerns. Still, he too had no desire to face another Galbatorix so soon after departing his homeland.

"Okay! Just one last test." Tuffnut shouted. Eragon turned to find

the man pumping his fists and reaching into the shoulder bag he was carrying. Eragon tipped his head to the side as the rider rummaged around a little, then whipped around with a dramatic flourish, dangling something in front of Saphira's snout. "Ta-da!"

Silence permeated the arena.

\_What is this? What are you doing?\_ Saphira asked, glancing at the rest of the riders for an explanation.

"What do you see?" The male twin asked, waving his hands and speaking like a hypnotist.

\_An eel.\_ Saphira snorted impatiently. \_Can we get this over with already? Do you want me to eat it something?\_

"Would you eat it?" Fishlegs asked, leaning forward in anticipation.

\_I don't see why not.\_ Saphira snapped her jaws at Tuffnut, who was waving the eel back and forth so it whacked her nose.

Eragon turned to the others in confusion, but they seemed just as perplexed as he was. Was there something about eels he didn't know about. He guessed it had something to do with the other dragons hissing and shrieking and backing as far away from Tuffnut's outstretched arm as they could.

"All right. No reaction to eels." Astrid concluded dismissively and put her hands on her hips. "Now all she needs is a name."

"Ooh, ooh! Pick me!" Tuffnut raised his hands. "I got one, I got one! Toothclaw! Fire-toothclaw!"

Personally, Eragon didn't see why Saphira's species needed a name, though he considered the Berkians needed something to call her since they appeared to have hundreds, if not thousands, of different dragon species.

"Nah, too general." Fishlegs vetoed the ideas.

Astrid turned to face them. "She has an awfully pretty coat of scales. Like gemstones. We ought to include that in the name at least."

"Shinycoat!" Snotlout voted. "Sparkly flyer!"

"Lame!" Ruffnut called. "How about Flightgem?"

"Hey, that's actually pretty good." Astrid exclaimed, sounding surprised.

\_No.\_ Saphira growled, indignantly curling her tailing around herself.

"How about we just name her species after her name?" Fishlegs suggest, turning to Eragon. "You said Bjartskular meant 'brightscales', didn't you?"

"That's right."

"Perfect." Fishlegs hunched over the Book of Dragons, scribbling at the tattered pages. "We'll call her the Alagaddesian Brightscales." No sooner than Saphira had been dubbed her new name, Toothless came bounding into the arena, carrying Hiccup on his back. Fishlegs closed the heavy tome and waved, "Perfect timing! How'd it go?"

"Not good." Hiccup answered, removing his helmet and running a hand through his hair. "At the rate they're traveling-Tuffnut, put that eel away! Thor, what's the matter with you?"

The younger man grinned, dancing away as Toothless fired a warning shot at his feet. "Whoop! Too slow!"

Hiccup sighed in irritation. "They're bound to be here tomorrow."

"Ouch." Astrid cast a worried glance back at Saphira. "Well, with Hookfang and Fanghook's help, we managed to get Eragon's ship out of the port to make room for the Berserker ships, provided he's following our ordinances."

"Three ships." Hiccup confirmed, dismounting and crossing his arms. "Where do we stand with Eragon's ship, anyway?"

Fishlegs grimaced. "Well, Gobber says the Blatginn won't be repaired till."

Hiccup waved a hand for silence. "Never mind. Anyone have any ideas on where we can keep Saphira, Eragon, and the dragon eggs until this whole ordeal is over and done with. I was thinking the Cove, but then Dagur may get it in his head to suggest a hunting party for deer and the like. I'd rather not raise suspicion by coming up with some obscure reason to say no."

"Why can't they just hide out in the Nest?" Ruffnut asked.

Astrid answered this time, "Because Dagur might want to 'inspect' the Dragon Nest, and we can't just forbid him from going in there. The same goes for the armory, the Great Hall, and pretty much anywhere on Berk."

"Is there anywhere Dagur wouldn't be interested in going?" Eragon suggested. Surely there was somewhere on the island they could stay safely hidden, but his heart sank as an uncertain look came over the faces of the others, including the dragons. Barf and Belch exchanged a glance, growling slightly, then turned to Hookfang. Meatlug nudged Fishlegs' shoulder unhappily, then went to Saphira, curling up by her paws.

"I don't know, but-" Astrid started to say.

"Mildew." Everyone stared at Snotlout. "What? There's no way Dagur will want to walk up that hill, there's nothing of interest for him up there, plus that smelly cabbage field is enough to scare an Outcast away. It's perfect! Who's with me, huh?"

The Berkian rider's words were lost on Eragon and Saphira, but as realization dawned on the others present. "You know, Snotlout." Hiccup said with a grin. "For someone who can't sail worth a yak pie,



you can be unexpectedly brilliant sometimes."

"For the last time! I had nothing to do with sinking that darn ship!"

"Yes, yes, I know it was the fault of the Twins, the rocks, Hookfang, and even Skullcrusher who wasn't even there." The black rider turned his attention toward the mountain high over their heads. "Mildew, thoughâ€¦this just might work."

Eragon glanced at Saphira. \_Why am I getting a bad feeling about this?\_

Fishlegs raised a hand. "Umâ€¦is he even still alive?"

"When was the last time anyone went up there?" Astrid wondered aloud.

"I think I saw that sheep of his recently." Snotlout considered. "Maybe. It could've been anyone's sheep."

## 5. Chapter 5

### Chapter 5

Mildew was alive, Eragon quickly found out via dodging a brown cabbage so old and rotting it smelled like boots and toe fungus. Hiccup watched the object sail past them, a mix of surprise and maybe a little relief on his face as he stepped toward the rickety house. "Good afternoon, Mildew. It's certainly been awhile. I see your cabbage field is doing well, aside from the unfortunate vegetation you so kindly launched at us. Good to know that miniature catapult I sent as a peace offering has been useful."

The house didn't answer.

"Are you sure this is a good idea?" Eragon asked. "I mean, after what you told me and all, are we sure we can trust him? Additionally, your father doesn't strike me as forgiving toward treacherous clansmen."

"Normally he isn't, but-." Hiccup began, but the front door suddenly crashed open and a sheep came charging across the yard, bleating angrily like a palace guard dog from Uru'baen. Startled, Eragon retreated several steps, but the animal seemed interested only in Hiccup. The older man stood still, twisting his head as the sheep ran around him in circles, screaming, "Bah!" and headbutting his legs. "Fungus, down!" The command had no effect on the sheep.

\_Can I eat him?\_ Saphira asked.

Hiccup shook his head. "I'd appreciate it if you didn't, considering we want Mildew's cooperation. You eating his pet mayâ€¦\_decrease\_ our chances somewhat." The sheep-Fungus-continued to bleat at him for several minutes, then switched his attention to Eragon. An odd sense of intelligence seemed to emanate from the animal's eyes, somewhat akin to Saphira or Solembum. Except where he saw mystery and wisdom in the werecat's eyes, Eragon could only see a disturbing sense of spite and malice within the sheep. "Uhâ€¦"

"Bah!"

Toothless snorted in reply.

"Mildew, come on!" Hiccup raised both hands in surrender. "Let's keep things civil. Call off your attack sheep and we'll talk. Okay?"

"Not speaking to you, boy!" Replied a window.

"Scram!"

"Bah!"

Hiccup shook his head. "Nope, can't do that, Mildew. I need your help with something, and since I convinced your chieftain to forgive and forget what you did, I think you can stand to at least hear me out."

"Forgive and forget?" Came the voice again, incredulous. "You taking me back into your tribe was part of Alvin's terms for the peace agreement."

"Bah!"

"Can't imagine why." The black rider muttered to himself, then called back, "We could've easily taken you off his hands and dumped you on Dragon Island for a few weeks. See how long you'd last."

Silence. Eragon glanced up at Saphira, shifted his weight from one leg to the other, scratched an itch, looked at Hiccup and Toothless, snatched his hand away from the sheep when it tried to bite him. \_To put up with this, Hiccup is going to be one of the most patient leaders I've ever met.\_ He could think of countless officials in the Varden and among the elves, political leaders and military officers alike, who would've resorted to a more strict or violent method by now. Toothless grumbled at his rider and nudged his head but was ignored.

Finally, after what seemed like hours, the front door opened, and a cranky, elderly man hobbled out, leaning on the staff he carried. Fungus bleated at them one last time, then made his way to his old companion, who ventured only a few feet out of his house before stopping stubbornly before them. "All right, boy. Speak your piece."

"Thank you, I appreciate it." Hiccup said with an amiable smile.

"Hmph."

"Allow me to introduce Eragon Shadeslayer of Alagãesia, and his dragon Saphira Bjartskular. They're visiting from a foreign nation across the sea, but their ship was wrecked on our coast--"

"Oh, spectacular timing, boy!" Mildew turned to Eragon, waving a withered hand. "Just before the Madman Chieftain is due for our annual peace treaty. Tsk, tsk, can you imagine what an insane dragon hunter will do when he hears of strangers in the Archipelago taking refuge on the island of his enemies?"

Saphira growled, but Hiccup raised a hand. "That's enough, they're uneasy as it is. Which brings me to asking a favor." The old man cast him a suspicious look but said nothing, so Hiccup continued, "Would you be willing-

"Not on your life!"

Eragon jumped back in surprise, but Hiccup rolled his eyes in annoyance. "Come on, I haven't even finished the question! All I need you to do is let these two hide up here, plus shelter a horde of dragon eggs, for a few days. At least until Dagur leaves, anyway."

The old man curled his upper lip skeptically.

"Saphira's not like other dragons." Hiccup continued, holding up his hands as though to fend off an attack, although the village elder made no move to do anything of the sort. Beside him, Toothless widened his eyes in a pleading, amiable expression. "She doesn't get into stuff she isn't supposed to. She's well-behaved, she'll do what she's told as long as you ask nicely. Maybe reason with her a little if she's being stubborn."

"Reason with a dragon!" Mildew exclaimed.

I have never been stubborn! Saphira roared indignantly at Hiccup. Toothless growled back at her.

Mildew jumped, staring wide-eyed at the blue dragon. "Odin's beard, will the surprises never end! Strangers and dragon eggs and talking dragons! It's too much for an old man! Too much, Hiccup!"

"Bah!" Screeched Fungus, now cowering behind his master's legs.

Hiccup raised his hands for peace. "Please, Mildew. Until the eggs hatch, Saphira is virtually the last of her kind. Surely, you can find it in yourself to cherish that and help us keep her and these eggs safe."

The old man grew very quiet, squeezing the staff until his knuckles turned bone-white. He looked up at Saphira, who glared down at him. He looked at Fungus, who kept quiet and stared mournfully back. He spared a glance for Eragon, but not for more than a moment. Then he glared at Hiccup, then the village, the sky, the sea, before he finally declared, "Not the eggs. You can hide the rider and Sa-Fear or whatever her name is here, but I won't have a stash of explosive dragon eggs in my house. Find another place to hide them." Hiccup tried to explain the eggs from Saphira's species didn't explode when they hatched, but the old man wasn't having it. "I won't do it! Don't want them spontaneously hatching and I find myself knee-deep in hatchlings. No, thank you!"

"Mildew-

Mildew waved his staff in Hiccup's face. "Besides, don't you think it'd be unwise to hide every egg in the same place? Think of it in terms of valuables. Would you rather hide all your heirlooms and precious items in a single clever cache, one that a thief can easily exploit? Or would you scatter them around, so if the thief finds one,

he won't find them all?"

Eragon and Hiccup were silent, glancing at one another, then returned their attention to the old man. "Wow, Mildew." Hiccup stated, "Not only did you agree to my request, but you also gave me a valuable piece of advice."

"Hmph. Now, get off my farm! I'm through talking to you. And I won't say it twice."

Hiccup graciously thanked him, then mounted Toothless and took off without a second to spare. Eragon nodded his thanks as well and followed suit before the elder could change his mind. Catching up to Hiccup and Toothless took no longer than a moment, but instead of returning to the village, Eragon noticed the black dragon was angling away from it, soaring along Berk's coastline and toward the setting sun. "Hey! Where are we going?"

Hiccup glanced over his shoulder and pointed to a rocky outcropping in the distance. "That rock is called Raven's Point. We'll be landing there."

Eragon blinked in surprise. \_Saphira?\_ But all he sensed from her mind was her puzzlement.

\_Perhaps he has something he wants us to see.\_ She suggested.

That was plausible. Perhaps Raven's Point was an outpost of some kind. It was certainly a high enough locale to spot any incoming threat, be it enemy ships or a rogue dragon. However, as soon as they landed and the two Riders set foot on the grass, Hiccup rounded on Eragon, green eyes bright with excitement. "So tell me more about Alagësia! I want to hear everything about the Varden, the elves and dwarves, those creatures you called Urgals, and how all of you defeated the evil king! And why was he evil? How did you raise Saphira? Given her intelligence, I doubt she needed any real training. What did your family think of her?"

Eragon found himself backtracking until he stood at the very edge of the cliffside, startled by his enthusiasm. \_Has he been keeping this bottled up all day?\_ He wondered.

\_Seems so.\_ Saphira agreed. \_And now that we have a solution to our dilemma with Dagur the Deranged, he's free to ask us whatever he wishes without hindering his concern for our self-interests.\_

Clever, Eragon thought. Clever man. Hiccup grinned as though guessing his thoughts, then opened his dragon's saddlebag and removed a leather bound book with blank pages. "Why do you want to know so badly?"

"This is a whole other land we're talking about here!" Hiccup explained, sharpening a pencil he removed from somewhere in his armor. "My people are natural-born explorers, so I want to know more about it."

\_This will be his third time hearing it.\_ Eragon realized. \_And this time, he wants an even more thorough account he can record.\_ The whole situation made him feel oddly nostalgic, reminding him of the

day he'd sought out Brom in Carvahall for stories about the dragons and their Riders. "You do know it's going to take more than a couple hours to retell everything to the extent you're looking for."

"I don't mind." Hiccup crossed his arms. "Why do you think I dragged you all the way up here?"

Once again, Eragon began at the beginning with how he'd found Saphira's egg and, as he'd done before Ajihad, Queen Islanzadë, Master Oromis and Glaedr, and Roran. He described his family, Carvahall, the Ra'zac dragon hunters that killed his uncle, his decision to hunt them down, how Brom accompanied him, the Urgal attacks, Teirm, Dras-Leona, his meeting with Murtagh, Brom's death, his capture in the city of Gilead, Arya's rescue, their flight to the Varden, and everything thereafter.

\_If your retelling of this epic saga never stops,\_ Saphira mused. \_You will never forget a single word, even when you become an old man.\_

Eragon grimaced. This retelling, however, seemed much shorter and quicker though, due to him leaving out magic and the Ancient Language. Hiccup's pen flew across one page after another, keeping up with Eragon's story without any trouble at all. Every so often, Eragon found himself forgetting to speak and staring at the speed the older man worked. Hiccup prompted him to continue on multiple occasions, seemingly unaware of the effect his strange talent had.

By the time Eragon was finished, concluding his tale with his departing Alagësia, the sun had set completely and his voice was raw with speaking. By the light of the small fire Hiccup had built, he began flipping through his notebook to survey his work. "Does that satisfy your curiosity?" Eragon asked hoarsely, coughing a little. Toothless gave his imitation of human laughter while Saphira snorted in amusement. But to his surprise, the expression on his friend's face seemedâ€¦dejected, as though the end of his tale had been a disappointment to him. Toothless seemed to think the same and nuzzled his Rider in an attempt to cheer him up. "Everything all right?"

"Yes." Hiccup said distractedly, intent on a blade of grass he was twirling between his fingers. "One thing does bother me about your story. Well, it's always bothered me. I don't know what it is, but every time you told it before, it seemedâ€¦incomplete, somehow. Even now, when you've told me the whole thing from front to finish in great detail, it still seems as though something's missing."

\_It's your omission of magic.\_ Saphira remarked privately to Eragon. \_It seems the young chieftain is sharper than we initially imagined, Eragon.\_

\_You may be right about that.\_ He answered, troubled by his friend's reaction. It felt wrong to leave him in the dark, just had Brom had once done so long ago, but was it right to introduce magic to a world that seemed fine without it? For all he knew, exposing the Archipelago to magic could give way to another Galbatorix, just as Queen Nasuada feared among the people in Alagësia. Not that he felt her intent to restrict the use of magic in such a way that resembled imprisonment was fair, but Eragon understood her concern. And what if

he were to expose Hiccup's people to magic? Would some learn to use it themselves, and if they did, wouldn't it would present another set of problems?

If he were to establish the new legion of Riders somewhere in this island chain and magic began to spread about the territory, then surely the High Queen's reign would extend to this part of the world. \_I'd bring destruction to Hiccup's people without even intending to.\_ No, it was best he keep his power to himself, and once the \_Blatqnn\_ was repaired, he would sail away to find a new land suited to his purposes.

"What happened to the elves?" Hiccup raised his head suddenly.

"Hm?"

"You said a host of elves accompanied you when you left your homeland. Where are they now?"

Eragon started to explain but stopped. He frowned, deep furrows wrinkling his brow and he turned away. What had happened to his companions? They'd sworn to protect him, Saphira, and the eggs, as well as assist him in helping the lost EldunarÃ- regain their sanity. Where were they? When was the last time he'd seen them?

"I don't know."

-0-0-0-

Author's Notes: Credit in this chapter goes specifically to Firestar's niece for her questions regarding the whereabouts of Eragon's elf companions. By prompting me to explain their absence, I was able to work it into the plot and conflict of Bond to improve the storyline.

A valuable lesson learned in constructive criticism. You have my sincerest thanks.

And a gracious thank you to everyone who has reviewed, favorited, and followed this story.

I don't own the Inheritance Cycle or How to Train Your Dragon.

## 6. Chapter 6

### Chapter 6

The next morning, Hiccup rose early and made his way to the Dragon Nest. Eragon was awake when he arrived, carefully removing the dragon eggs from their respective crates and gently depositing them in satchels to protect them. Saphira greeted him and Toothless, but the foreign rider only nodded silently. He'd been distracted since yesterday, lost in thought, trying to remember what had become of his companions. Hiccup had resolved to keep the query to himself. It would only draw suspicion to Eragon, who genuinely did not seem to know the elves' fate.

But how was that possible, Hiccup wondered as he began unpacking

eggs. It was as though any knowledge of it had simply vanished, wiped clean, not faded away with the passing of time. That was out of the question, though. Memories just didn't disappear like that, yet he supposed if something traumatic had occurred, his friend may have been suppressing it. After all, he himself did not remember being conscious when he lost his leg, yet everyone in the Academy swore he was when the adults took the mangled and burned limb off. He shuddered to think of what had happened to Eragon to make him repress his memory like that.

He said nothing to Eragon. The foreign rider seemed bewildered enough as it was, pressing him for answers right now wouldn't help either of them.

Astrid and Snotlout and their dragons arrived, followed by Fishlegs and Meatlug, but the Twins, Barf, and Belch must've slept in for no one saw either of them until noon when Snotlout pounded on their door to hide a trio of eggs. After the meeting in the Great Hall last night, every villager on Berk was willing to accept two or three eggs, hiding them in the most clever spaces: deep in closets, buried in trunks, hidden under floorboards. Meatlug buried two behind the Ingerman house, and the Jorgensons were daring enough to take five eggs to hide, not surprisingly making a competition of it.

Only Stoick and Gobber did not participate in concealing the eggs, for they intended to check each and every home before Dagur arrived and try to locate any eggs that needed a better hiding place.

Hiccup scattered eggs all across the island, stashing them in every hiding place he could remember from his childhood: under a porch, in an abandoned badger den, deep under a clutch of brambles, in the hollow of an old, fir tree, under a flat grey stone covering a hole where he used to keep some of his treasures, and many others. Toothless watched him in astonishment, amazed at all the nooks and crannies of the forest his rider knew about.

From the air, Hiccup could see several of his clansmen dotting the fields, still racing to bring in the harvest before the first snow, and dozens more sprinting across the furrows and between houses in the village in search of hiding spots. All was well, he thought in satisfaction, until he ran into Astrid that afternoon.

She cornered him in the food storehouse, her and Stormfly both, while he was hiding a pair of twin green eggs under a pile of grain sacks. "Out of curiosity, have you spoken to my father yet?"

Hiccup went cold, trying to think of a graceful response. He hadn't, but from the look on her face, she knew that already. Astrid sighed, cradling two of the strange, golden spheres in her arms as she moved across the floor. Despite himself, Hiccup frowned at the objects, wondering what they was. They couldn't be eggs. Eragon had told him only one species of dragon existed in Alagãesia, so how could one breed produce two completely different types of eggs?

Was this what he'd sensed Eragon's story was missing? But why? What was so important about that sphere he couldn't speak of it? Had they given him any reason not to trust them? Perhaps it wasn't about trust, and it was a secret only a dragonrider of his homeland could know about.

And there was still the matter of Toothless' tail and how it had brokenâ€¦|.

Astrid grabbed his armor and shook him. "Are you listening to me?"

"Sorry, I was just thinking."

The young woman sighed in frustration and pushed her way past him, kneeling before a pile of flour sacks. Hiccup winced as she irritably tore one open, stuffed in an 'egg-whatever-it-was' in and buried it in the white powder. He was glad they'd counted all the eggs and 'not eggs' before they'd started, otherwise they'd have no way of knowing whether or not they'd found them all when Dagur left. And that was sure to be a chore all on its own.

"So what's the hold-up?" Astrid asked, rising to her feet and brushing flour off her hands whilst cradling the other sphere in the crook of her arm. "It's not as though he doesn't know about us. Are you afraid of my dad?"

"Frankly, yes." Hiccup answered bluntly, ignoring the incredulous look she, as well as Toothless and Stormfly, sent him. "I'll admit it. He's like Hookfang when you steal a fish from him. Maybe even a little worse. Like Dagur when you throw a rare dragon in front of him, and then take it away."

She might've taken comparing her father to Dagur the Deranged as an insult to her family, but she seemed to let it slide in favor of the current issue. "Okay, Hiccup, now you're being ridiculous."

"Am I?" He crossed his arms in a challenging manner. "Think of the Great Snoggletog Hammer Throw Debacle and tell me I'm wrong. And the Ice-wyrm Incident, the Trespassing Dispute involving him, Silent Sven, two yaks, and a rooster. Oh, right, don't forget about the-

Astrid glared. "Don't you dare say it!"

"The Turnip Stew Disaster."

"Argh!" She put her hands on her head. "I'd rather face the Flightmare again!"

"Look." Hiccup said, gripping her shoulders. "I just need a little more time. While nothing would make me happier than to talk to Baldur, you have to agree he isn't exactly â€¦|.\_rational\_ man. I have to think of a good approach that doesn't end with my final journey out to sea in a flaming funeral longboat."

Her blue eyes went wide with alarm. "I wouldn't let Father kill you!"

"I know you wouldn't, but I don't think that'll stop him from trying."

Curling her lips in a wry smile, Astrid crossed her arms. "You underestimate me, my lord. As if Baldur Hofferson would say no to his little lass."



Hiccup sighed uneasily. "Give me until after our treaty signing with the Berserkers and after we see Shadeslayer and Saphira off Berk. Up until then, I've got way too much to deal with."

He hated shoving her to the bottom of his priority pile, but to his everlasting gratitude she kept her peace. After all, the madmen tribe and the Alagöesian rider did take precedence, and Astrid was patient enough to realize that. "All right, but promise me it'll be soon, okay?"

"I swear it." Hiccup nodded, smiling in relief. He looked down at the second golden sphere in her hands. "How many of those do you suppose are left?"

"This is one of the last ones." She answered. "Fishlegs, Snotlout, and Eragon just took the last few up into the mountains, and the Twins are busyâ€¦burying, I think, another batch on the beach."

"Well, I hope they dug a deep enough hole." Breathing a sigh of relief, Hiccup nodded in satisfaction. It was midday, and any moment their sentries would be announcing the Berserkers' arrival. Over an hour ago, Gustav and Fanghook had come crashing into the town square, announcing they'd spotted three Berserker ships. Since then, other riders had been scouting the area, returning with the reports their visitors were getting closer and closer, and providing more urgency to their preparations. Tension stretched tight cords throughout the village, and everyone avoided them as though the slightest disturbance would cause them to snap.

It wasn't just Eragon and Saphira's lives that were at stake. Hiccup couldn't even begin to fathom the repercussions his village would face should Dagur discover them and turn his insane anger to Berk. He might declare war, viewing the Alagöesians as a threat, and therefore violating their treaty. Shuddering, Hiccup pointed to the not-egg. "Why don't you let me take that?"

"Huh? Oh, okay." Astrid gingerly placed the object in his hands.

He froze.

"Hiccup?"

Her voice seemed so faraway, as though she were calling out to him from the far side of a great river. He tried to answer her, but something stopped him. Something that tickled that back of his mind, prodding at him like a bad itch under a poorly secured splint. Then a sense of pain and fear and agony suddenly rushed through his mind, battering his thoughts as the most violent typhoon the Sullen Sea could offer would torment a flock of dragons. What is this? What's happening? Something hard struck his knees and he heard Astrid calling his name again and again, shaking him, and asking if he was all right. Dropping the sphere altogether, he clasped his hands over his hair, tearing at the roots. Stopâ€¦please, stop! Nausea welled in the back of his throat, threatening to overwhelm him, yet still the panicked torrent showed no signs of letting up. Odin, if it didn't stop soon, he was going to go mad!

Help meâ€¦!

Hiccup widened his eyes. What was that? A voice? \_Helpâ€|. \_ In the darkest corner of his head, there was a voice. It wasn't Astrid's. He couldn't tell if it was male or female, but it just as strong and clear as Saphira's, except riddled with terror and panic. "\_Who are you?"\_ He asked. "\_Are you all right?"\_

The voice did not answer him. \_Serinath, where are you? I'm scared. Please help me!\_

"Hiccup!" A fist punched him in the shoulder, jolting him awake and the anguish he felt evaporated like the smothered wick of a burning candle. He raised his eyes to meet Astrid's agitated ones. "Are you all right?"

Toothless pushed her out of the way and rumbled into his face, nudging his cheek. Raising a trembling hand, Hiccup scratched at the black dragon's nose and noticed he was on his knees. Warily stanching up, he saw the sphere was lying innocently on the floor several feet away, presumably where he'd dropped it, looking as unremarkable as rain in spring. Why hadn't it affected Astrid? She'd been carrying it around all day, hadn't she? Yet she'd never felt thatâ€|.presence. And thank Thor. It was as though another being altogether had invaded his head and tried to force their agony onto him. What had he done different that had-for the love of Loki, what was \_it! \_"That does it!" Hiccup whirled around and stormed off. "I'm going to go find Eragon and ask him what these things are. He can claim they're eggs all he wants, but it's an Odin-forsaken lie! If they-"

The sound of a horn blared across the island, silencing the words in his mouth. Hiccup whirled around, his green eyes immediately finding the ocean and narrowing at the vague, white sails in the distance. Four dragons, probably Monstrous Nightmares, were circling the small fleet, though one by one, their riders urged them back to Berk, flying at full speed.

The Berserkers had arrived.

-0-0-0-

"Were you able to hide Eragon and Saphira, son?"

Hiccup managed to nod as he adjusted the new connecting rod in his dragon's tale. "I haven't heard any complaints from Mildew. Well, yet."

"Yet?" Stoick fixed him with a sharp glance. "Are you expecting trouble?"

"No, but it's Mildew. I prefer not to get my hopes up."

Snotlout suddenly pounded him on the back, knocking him forward several strides and shouted, "I told you! Mildew's just fine with it. It's the sheep I wouldn't trust." Smugly crossing his arms, his cousin nodded in satisfaction. "But then again, Fungus can't talk and only a deranged man would listen to a sheep."

"Oh!" Fishlegs spread his arms in a carefree manner. "Kinda like the deranged man visiting us today."

"I wouldn't put my trust in a sheep either." Ruffnut yawned. "But

personally, I think yaks are a trickier crowd."

"Yeah, with their big, dewy eyes and their stupid, slack jaws." Tuffnut agreed. "Natural-born liars."

Hiccup sighed in frustration, pulling himself onto Toothless' back. "Just remember what you're supposed to say if Dagur or any of the Berserkers ask about the farm on the mountain." Toothless rumbled in agreement as though relaying the message to the other dragons.

"Right!" Ruffnut gave him a thumbs up. "The farm's abandoned and it's where women go to do their monthly lady business out of the way of the manly men of the tribe!"

"Very good." Toothless took flight, and Hiccup shivered as the cold, autumn wind rushed past him. Stoick and Skullcrusher along with the other dragon riders caught up to him within minutes, neither of them uttering a sound as they made their way to the harbor.

Only three ships were docked at the quay, and the largest was the flagship, *Banahçgg*. Hiccup narrowed his eyes at the sight of it. It didn't look anywhere near as barbaric as an Outcast ship, yet he couldn't ignore the feeling of revulsion it gave him whenever he saw it. Over two dozen men crowded the deck, all of them raising their heads as he and Toothless flew over them. Also on the deck, he spotted a lone woman who wore a *bunad*, like many woman of the Archipelago, except instead of armor she wore a black shawl over her head and shoulders with the Skrill emblem sewn in blue. *That must be the Berserker Lady.* *He thought.* Dagur hadn't changed a bit. Hiccup could see the twisting horns of his helmet from where he flew.

Toothless and Skullcrusher landed on the dock with a heavy 'thud' and strode toward the gangplank, awaiting the chieftain to disembark. As he'd done during so many other visits, Captain Vorg announced Dagur's arrival with a bloated list of outrageous titles that made Hiccup cringe in annoyance. "The great and fearsome"

"Dagur the Deranged!" Hiccup cut him off, whipping his head to the side as the Berserker Chieftain flung a knife at him, the blade burying itself deep into the post behind him. "We know already."

"How long has it been, *brother*?" Dagur asked with his infamous sneer.

"Oh, I don't think it's been long enough." Hiccup shrugged as Toothless growled in agreement. Stoick cast them a warning glance. "Settle down, bud. He's not here to fight." *Not right now, anyways*.

Stoick cleared his throat to regain attention. "I trust you had fair weather during your journey?"

Hiccup didn't hear Dagur's response as he frowned as the young woman took a few steps back, pulling her shawl further over her eyes. *Is she all right? Or does Dagur mistreat her? I wouldn't be surprised if he did, but*. She was such a small thing standing among her people. Their eyes met for an instant, forest green to dark shadows,

but she looked away and wrapped her arms around herself.

"Poor thing." He murmured to himself. \_I hope she's okay. \_Then she raised one of her little, white hands and surreptitiously waved at him. Smiling a little, he waved back before Dagur could notice. "Your letter mentioned would be presenting your wife at this treaty signing." He spoke up when the two chieftains were done speaking. "Would she be the young lady standing behind you?"

"Captain!" Dagur shouted suddenly, grasping the Lady's arm and tugging her forward, making her stumble and cry out. Hiccup winced at the rough treatment. "If you would do the honors."

"And the wife of our chieftain," Hiccup's eyes widened as the Berserker Lady hesitantly pulled her shawl from her dark hair, but Captain Vorg continued, "and the lady of the Berserker Tribeâ€" "

"\_Heather?\_"

-0-0-0-

Author's Notes: Yes, Heatherâ€|.don't ask me why. I really don't have an answer. I don't even remember where that idea came from.

And I'm also aware it's been awhile since my last update. Writer's block is so frustrating. It could've been worse, though. I \_used\_ to update once a year. No, seriously, it was awful. Nonetheless, I hope you enjoyed the latest installment. Thank you for reading.

I don't own How to Train Your Dragon or The Inheritance Cycle.

## 7. Chapter 7

### Chapter 7

\_This is just like when I used to hide from the Empire.\_ Saphira rumbled low in her throat, her discontent rolling in waves across Eragon's consciousness.

In response, her rider emitted a long, heavy sigh and patted her neck. The dusty gloom of Mildew's house oddly reminded him of his old home in Carvahall, albeit the old Viking's shack was much more cramped and dilapidated than the house he'd once shared with Garrow and Roran. Their host was by the window, peering idly down at the village with one of Hiccup's spyglasses. There was a smaller one mounted on the sill, apparently for Fungus, who was using it with such a strange intensity Eragon was almost tempted to read the sheep's thoughts.

"The Berserker's have landed at the dock." The old man reported. "And there they'll stay until their chieftain's patience wears out."

"Thank you for allowing us to hide here." Eragon said belatedly.

Mildew grumbled to himself in response. "Dagur killed his father, you know." Eragon and Saphira raised their heads in alarm, but the elder

took no notice. "Not that he ever says it out loud, but Oswald the Agreeable died by his son's hand. Or axe, depending on his mood."

\_So a kinkiller as well as a madman.\_ Eragon leaned back against Saphira. He tried to focus on the potential threat, but instead, he found himself thinking of Blādhgarm and the others who'd accompanied them. How could he have forgotten them after all they'd done? They were his friends and protectors, and it took all his self-control not to fly out with Saphira in search of them. Common sense told him it was foolish. He had no idea where to start looking, especially since he didn't know when and where in the Sinister Sea his memories of them had been erased. Saphira was just as baffled, and he often found her frowning to herself in concentration and growling when she failed to recall.

\_Saphira,\_ He asked. \_Did we even trade the Talā-ta for the Blatqnn?\_

\_Not that I recall. Although I do remember thinking it odd we exchanged a sure and graceful ship made by elven hands for a monstrous beast that seemed built for war.\_

And who in this part of the world would be strong enough to overpower a band of elven spellcasters and a Dragon Rider? Magic did not exist here, at least not magic with the Ancient Language. Had someone been following them, he wondered. But the only thing that could hide its consciousness was a Ra'zac, and those monsters were all dead. Something else? But what?

What \_did\_ he remember from his days at sea?

Behind him, Saphira shifted so her bulk rested a little more comfortably in their restricting accommodations.

\_I'm sorry to make you hide again.\_ He whispered to her. \_I know how much you hated that.\_

\_It isn't so bad.\_ She brushed her muzzle against his head. \_I'm not hiding alone this time.\_

-0-0-0-

"It's been awhile, hasn't it, Hiccup?" Heather said with a small smile.

"Do you do know each other?" Dagur asked, looking back and forth between them.

"We shared a misadventure once." Hiccup crossed his arms. And what had happened since? The last time they'd seen Heather, she'd been sailing away with her parents, hopefully to return to her normal life on her island. What could have happened in between then? Her parents hadn't seemed the type to sell out their daughter against her will for wealth or status, and he'd always viewed Heather as sensible enough not to trust a madman for any reason, let alone marriage and sharing house and home with one. Not only that, Dagur \_most definitely\_ had no interest in a wife.

Unless he'd suddenly decided to continue his line, butâ€¦.Hiccup

resisted making a face as his father stepped forward. "Welcome back to Berk, Dagur. And you as well, Heather. I hope you've been well these past years."

She nodded, holding her dress out of the way of her boots as she followed her chieftain and husband down the gangplank. A contingency of Berserker warriors followed, all of them armed to the teeth. \_Great Thor.\_ Hiccup glanced at his father. It was as though they'd come to aid Berk in a battle, not sign a peace treaty. What was going on? Did Dagur intend to make war with them again? Stoick gave no reaction to the host, except to welcome them onto the docks.

Dagur wasted no time, insisting their visit begin with the annual tour, as though they were hiding something new from him every year. And for the first time in four years, he was right. Not for the first time that morning, Hiccup hoped the Brightscale eggs had been securely hidden. Sliding off Toothless' back, he bowed as politely as he could manage to Dagur, then a bit more sincerely to Heather, then led the way with his father into the village.

The traditional tour of Berk had increased in the duration of time it required over the years. Once upon a time, it had only consisted of the armory, the food storehouse, various shops throughout the village, the dragon arena, and the Great Hall. Now, however, it included all the dragon amenities scattered about the island: the elaborate stables, the fire prevention network, the feeding stations, and, of course, his personal favorite, the dragon racing arena. The population of dragons seemed to increase every year as well, something that both bothered and reassured Hiccup whenever he saw Dagur's annoyed face.

"This way." He directed, skirting a pair of Terrors wrestling in the dirt and ducking under a Nadder's tail. Dagur's company followed close behind, although accosted by a number of dragons eager to examine the newcomers. Every time Hiccup glanced back at them, he had to stop himself from laughing at the Berserker Chieftain as he found himself nose to nose with every dragon on the island and unable to do a thing about it without violating the treaty. Heather didn't seem to mind the attention one bit, tentatively reaching out to stroke a Nadder's nose or pat a passing Gronckle on the head. She did, however, return her hands to her sides whenever Dagur looked back to her.

The villagers of Berk played their part well, going about their daily lives as though Berserkers (and hidden dragon eggs) were just another chore to handle. On the other hand, maybe there was no time to worry. With winter fast approaching, it was entirely possible they were more worried about the harvest than someone stumbling across the cleverly stashed eggs. \_They're hidden well.\_ Hiccup assured himself. \_All of them.\_

Or so he'd thought until the tour reached the armory. At once, Dagur took up one of their swords and swung it around. His wife and men jumped back and Toothless growled. The Berserker took no notice, twirling it in his fingers, lunging at imaginary opponents (or dragons), slashing, stabbing, cutting, no doubt killing something in his mind. Yet he did so in silence, almost absently, with a brooding expression on his face that Hiccup somehow found even more troubling than his deranged ranting.

"So, Dagurâ€¦." Stoick began. "How are the Berserker Isles faring? What with winter approaching earlier than usual, have you been able to complete your harvest?"

Dagur thrust the sword back into a barrel (not the one he grabbed it from) with such force, it toppled over. "Oh, very nearly. Perhaps. I don't know. Theâ€¦domestic matters of agriculture are handled by my sister. You remember Indell, right?"

Hiccup stiffened as a purple egg suddenly rolled out of the upended barrel and into plain view behind Dagur.

Heather's eyes went wide with shock and she stared up at him, then suddenly dropped her shawl, letting it fall to the floor and cover the runaway egg before any of the Berserker warriors or her husband could notice. Instinctively, Hiccup turned to where Dagur was talking to his father, who had suddenly pounded his massive hand into the younger man's back and proclaimed in a loud voice, "Of course I remember Indell! How could anyone forget Oswald the Agreeable's favorite daughter?"

Dagur narrowed his eyes. "She's his only daughter."

"Why don't we head outside for some air? It's a lovely day, no?"

Whatever Dagur's response might've been was lost to Hiccup as the Berserker soldiers filed out and he turned to Heather. "Thank you." He breathed. That was too close.

Heather nodded, stooping to pick up the shawl and egg and cradling it in her arms like a baby. "Why is there an egg in here, Hiccup? Are there more? Is this what you're hiding from Dagur?"

He hesitated, sharing a glance with Toothless, then nodded. "Yeah. I-It's complicated."

"I see." She turned away, running her fingers over the smooth dragon egg. "It's so beautiful. Which species laid this one?"

"That would be a new breed we're looking into now."

"Ah, a mystery, then?"

Hiccup nodded, unwilling to divulge any more. It wasn't that he didn't trust Heatherâ€¦okay, perhaps he didn't trust Heather as much as he wanted to. She was married to one of Berk's deadliest rivals now. Even if she wasn't fishing for information to pass to Dagur, he wasn't certain he wanted too much knowledge of the Brightscale eggs, or of Eragon and Saphira's existence for that matter, floating about in her head. "How is your life with Dagur?" He diverted. It was polite to ask, he felt, not just because he was genuinely curious what it was like sharing house and home with a madman. Heather's green eyes clouded and for a moment, Hiccup thought she was going to cry. Toothless noticed as well and padded toward her, rumbling and nudging her elbow. Gods, does he abuse her or something?

"Dagur is good to me." She said shortly.

Liar. "Are you sure?" Hiccup persisted. "I know we're not of the

same tribe, Heather but if you're being mistreated, you have to-

"Dagur is good to me." She repeated and elaborated no further, passing the egg back into his hands and striding out the door.

-0-0-0-

Berk had changed so much since her last visit, Heather thought sadly. Everywhere she looked, dragons of every species occupied the village square, sunning themselves on rooftops, chasing each other between houses, playing with their riders. A small smile spread across her face, but she made it disappear before anyone could see it. It was beautiful, though. The perfect harmony between man and dragon the Berk Tribe had achieved.

Compared to this, her tribe seemed so close-minded. Any mention of dragons was practically forbidden back home. Not that it was an official law, but one risked invoking Dagur's wrath when mentioning the great beasts.

As she hurried back to the Berserker party, she sensed Hiccup and Toothless following close behind. He'd been trying to meet her eyes ever since she arrived, as though trying to ask what happened. How had she come to be the bride of the Berserker Chieftain? Even Toothless was rumbling plaintively at her. \_I'm sorry. \_It wasn't as though she chose this, she wanted to tell them. But not now. Not in front of so many people.

She quickly caught up with her clansmen and bit her lip to avoid crying out as Dagur grabbed her arm, pulling her forward. Belatedly, she realized their tour was complete and they were to be taken to the Great Hall for a feast to welcome the Berserker Tribe. \_Her\_ people now. "Are you pleased with the tour, my Lord?"

Dagur scowled.

This was not missed by the Berk heir, whose green eyes twitched in suspicion. He was wary of them, she noted. Far less trusting than the boy she'd met a few years ago, who believed everything she said without question. Granted, her lord husband had given Hiccup far more reasons to distrust him than she ever did, but she couldn't deny he'd changed as much as his home had. He seemed more resentful in their presence, or cautious. Even Toothless kept his distance from them, which hurt surprisingly more. To be rejected by a dragon, especially when he'd just demonstrated his concern for her—she wanted to pull her shawl up and bow her head in shame, but she knew Dagur wouldn't let her. It would disgrace him as well. So, forcing a smile, she drew herself upright, standing tall with the pride a woman of her status should have.

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Astrid took her seat among her friends, exempting Hiccup, who sat at the high table with his father and Dagur. None of them said a word, still reeling from the revelation Heather was the new Berserker Lady. Certainly, the notion Dagur had taken a wife seemed absurd the other day, but the notion that wife was their old friend seemed like some kind of a joke! Heather kept her distance from them, picking quietly



at her food, not making eye contact with anyone, even her own clansmen. Well, those stern or drunk Berserker soldiers certainly didn't look like they'd be very good company. So far as they'd seen, Heather was the only visiting female. Not even a handmaiden or servant of some sort had accompanied her. That was to be expected, of course. The finances of the tribe had been crippled in the war, so the extravagance of hired hands or the loathsome practice of \_thralldom\_ was too expensive.

But what of Heather's home tribe? Astrid narrowed her eyes in thought. "Fishlegs, in the short time we knew Heather, did she ever say where she was from?"

The scholar of the Dragon Academy looked up from his plate in surprise. "I don't believe so. Why?"

"Just a hypothesis."

"Big word!" Tuffnut cut in, closing his eyes and holding up his hands. "Hold it. Hooold it. I got this one, I got this oneâ€¦ a hypothesis isâ€¦.ohhhh!" He scrunched up his brow in concentration. "An untested theory! A proposed explanation born out of speculation and minimal evidence."

"Very good." Fishlegs nodded. "I'm impressed."

"Thanks." Tuffnut grinned in satisfaction, then murmured to his sister. "Now what's a theory?"

Astrid cleared her throat to gain everyone's attention. "If I may continue, it's about Heather."

"What about her?" Snotlout waved a dismissive hand.

"About her sudden marriage to Dagur." She crossed her arms. "We don't know where Heather's from offhand, but could she be from a wealthy tribe? Surely, if her family intended to marry her off, then they would've provided a generous dowry to her husband, \_especially\_ if she was an only daughter. Perhaps Dagur's planning to use those funds to rebuild his army?"

"Hate to burst your bubble," Ruffnut spoke up. "But did you notice what she was wearing the first time she came to Berk? She was all rags and tags when we met her. No way is a rich family sending their daughter around without dressing her up like a pretty, little doll."

That was true, Astrid thought. But what other explanation was there? "Dagur can't possibly love her, right? Could I just be looking for trouble where none exists?"

"I'm sorry." Snotlout turned to face her. "But did I just hear you implying that Dagur-crazy, deranged, psychotic Dagur, the same Dagur who's tried to kill us with a Skrill and dragon root and Smokebreath Dragons and crossbows and armadas and a Screaming Death-is capable of any kind of affection for anything outside his vast array of killing utensils?"

"For once, I agree with him." Fishlegs stated sagely. "I don't think Dagur really cares for anyone outside himself. He killed his father

after all."

"We never proved that." Astrid pointed out.

"It doesn't need proving."

Astrid sighed and glanced across the Hall. As unlikely as it was, it was the only explanation she could think of. Aside from Heather being the daughter of wealthy chieftain, of course. She didn't think that was likely, though. She'd seen her father, after all, and he was definitely no chief in the Archipelago. But Dagur loving Heather? Not with the way he'd been pulling her around all day, like an unruly slave girl.

She was mercifully interrupted from her thoughts when Stoick to his feet, holding a tankard aloft, "A warm welcome to our guests. We give thanks to Ægir and his lady, Ran, for granting safe passage across the Sinister Sea to Dagur and his tribe." The assembly raised their tankards in agreement, though there didn't seem to be any heart in them. No one at their table raised their voices and cheered, and their individual drinks were consumed in silence. "And to Heather, the lovely Lady of the Berserker Tribe, mistress of the fen, and daughter of Frigga. May her days be happy ones."

Heather's toasts garnered more cheers, Astrid noticed, which made the young woman flush and turn away in embarrassment, and not the good kind. The good kind of embarrassment was the bashful modesty a young bride should've felt, yet Heather looked as though Chief Stoick had just brought up the most humiliating moment of her life and embellished it in great detail. Poor thing. She wished she would look her way, just so that she could give her a nod of encouragement. Or maybe I should go talk to her. She hesitated on that matter. What if Heather preferred to be left alone? Astrid knew she would want to be alone, wouldn't want another's pity. But the support definitely wouldn't hurt.

She was so deep in thought she barely noticed Hiccup coming to sit beside her, pushing Snotlout out of the way in the process. He put a hand on her shoulder, touching her with such awkward caution there was almost no affection in the gesture, as though he feared moving too quickly would garner a punch to the stomach. She smiled indulgently to herself, then scooted closer and leaned her head into his shoulder, pulling at his hand so his arm rested more snugly around her. Hiccup stiffened, spine tightening at the sudden proximity, but she felt him relax a moment later, resting his head against hers and sneaking a quick kiss to her temple.

He's getting braver. She mused, closing her eyes in contentment. Toothless arrived a second later, rumbling as he rested his head on the bench beside her. Astrid smiled and scratched at his ears.

"You look troubled." Hiccup noted.

Astrid caught sight of Heather's gaze then, and how alone she looked, ignored by her husband and clansmen. Their eyes met, forest green to sapphire blue, and she turned away in shame. We're alike now. Astrid realized with a pang. Heather and me. She's married, unlike me. And unlike Heather, her prospective husband loved her and openly showed it. Heather had certainly gotten the wrong end of the dragon in that arrangement. She could only imagine what she felt being

snubbed like that. Or perhaps, since it was Dagur, it was better she was ignored.

Still, sitting with Hiccup like thisâ€¦it felt like she was rubbing in her own happiness. Astrid swallowed and put some distance between them. Hiccup glanced at her in surprise. Wordlessly, she nodded toward their old friend. With a nod, he rose to his feet and began to pick his way across the Hall. She moved to do the same, but she noticed two Berserkers, one with a familiar, demented stride, making their way toward the great doors. \_Now what are they up to?\_

She glanced at Hiccup, who was halfway to Heather by then, looked to the doorway as Dagur and his clansman vanished through them, then crept to her feet and started after them. Stormfly saw her go and extricated herself from the tangle of dragon limbs she and Toothless had formed to follow her. The black dragon raised his head to watch them go, rumbling in concern.

The cool night air kissed her skin as she exited the stuffy Hall and spotted the Berserkers cutting across the village square. Climbing atop her dragon's back, Astrid followed close behind, relying on Stormfly's stealth and superior eyesight in the darkness. The village was abandoned tonight, both because of the hour and the welcoming feast. Here and there, a few candles were lit in homes, likely belonging to mothers staying home to take care of their smaller children. Stormfly cut through the village, weaving her way between houses and shops as they followed their quarry.

\_Where are you headed?\_ Astrid frowned, wishing she'd had brought her axe. It was sitting at home, the terms of the new treaty prohibiting weapons in the Great Hall during feasts. What was Dagur after? Certainly not to his ship. He knew the way around Berk, and he'd missed the turn to head toward the docks. So why-\_The Nest?\_ Astrid tightened her grip on Stormfly's saddle. The Dragon Nest had taken the bulk of the Brightscale eggs, small handfuls of them hiding in plain sight, disguised as clutches laid by Tidal dragons on the beach. Since no one knew what Tidal Class dragon eggs looked like, none would be the wiser. It didn't matter if Dagur saw them here. Dragon eggs in the Nest wouldn't be unusual in the least. The only flaw in that plan was the sheer number of eggs, which he might've seen as 'army-building' aggressive, leading to the relocation of the remaining eggs.

Dismounting, Astrid scurried after the pair as they slipped inside, one of them taking up a torch by the entrance.

"Are you sure about this, my lord?" She heard Captain Vorg's gruff voice. "The Berkians have been very generous these past few years. Lenient in the terms of the new treaty even when our tribe betrayed them. All these years, they've done nothing to indicate aggression, except in self-defense. I beg you, my lord, let the sleeping dragon lie. It wouldn't be wise to rile them up again."

"The new treaty?" Dagur's voice answered. Astrid peered around the twist in the caves to see them standing side by side before the sealed nursery doors, Dagur holding torch above his head.. "The new treaty is nothing more than Berkian pity on our people. Terms set to control and humiliate the Berserker Tribe, and our people have suffered the humiliation of defeat for long enough. When I rebuild my army, Captain, there'll be no need for the new treaty. And with

Menafora's help, we'll be unstoppable. We'll retake our former glory and avenge our honor against Berk."

\_Rebuild his army?\_ \_He can't mean the Brightscale eggs? There's no way he could know about themâ€¦.unless someone in the Great Hall said something they shouldn't have.\_ It wasn't as though they'd sworn everyone to secrecy, but with the way everyone had participated in concealing the eggs, she just assumedâ€¦.Astrid shook herself. Enough, maybe someone had drunk too much mead and it slipped out. \_But what else could he be talking about?\_ Was her theory about Heather right? Was Dagur building an army of mercenaries? \_And who is Menafora?\_ That wasn't a familiar name. She ducked as the Berserker captain glanced her way. \_A Berserker Elder maybe?\_

"What is it, Captain?"

"I thought I saw someone, sir."

Astrid stiffened and started to back away, only to be stopped by Stormfly, who fixed her with a glance that seemed almost disparaging. It was a very odd feeling, being stared down by a disparaging Nadder, but she took her dragon's hint. \_Why am I sneaking around on my own island?\_ She asked herself irritably. \_This is my home, not theirs. What's Dagur's excuse?\_ With that, she rose to her full height and strode into the Nest. The Berserker Chieftain and Captain Vorg froze in their tracks, startled. Astrid feigned a surprised look, as though she hadn't expected to find anyone in here. "Oh! Good evening." She said, bowing respectfully. "What brings you to our humble Dragon Nest?"

She watched their eyes flick toward one another, as though evaluating how much of their plan had been eavesdropped on, if at all. Astrid clasped her hands nervously, hoping her smile looked genuine enough. Then Dagur smiled his twisted smile. "Nothing, my good woman. Nothing but simple curiosity. You see, I'm very intrigued as to what lies beyond those doors. Your chieftain skipped over them during our tour this afternoon. Would you mind-"

"Not a problem." Astrid stepped past them and, without a moment's hesitation, heaved the great doors open. "This is merely the dragon nursery, where the queen dragons lay their eggs and raise the hatchlings for a short time before we relocate them to an outdoor enclosure where they can enjoy the sun better. Dragon's get very melancholy when they're locked up, you know. I expect Hiccup and Chief Stoick neglected to tell you about it because it's empty now."

"Is it really?" Dagur asked in a displeased voice.

"Indeed. We're nowhere close to the breeding season." Astrid swung the door shut and leaned against it, casually waving her hand about. "So it'll be a while before we have baby dragons to deal with. Boulder, Sharp, and Stoker classes normally breed at the same time unfortunately. They are cute beyond belief, but they can be quite a handful. Even their own mothers have trouble-"

"You're Hiccup's, aren't you?" Dagur interrupted.

"Excuse me?"

"You know what I mean?" Dagur waved a hand in front of him. "That specific girl, the one he has a liking to. You're his, right?"

Astrid planted her feet apart and crossed her arms, all pretense of good manners forgotten. "I don't belong to anyone." She said in a hard voice. Sensing her rider's irritation, Stormfly hissed in support.

Captain Vorg raised his spear in defense, but his chieftain waved him aside. "Stand down. I meant nothing by it, woman. I was just curious to know." He leaned forward. "Is your envy the reason you've been watching my Heather all night?"

Astrid clenched her jaw. "I think it would be best if you left now." She warned, then added in a mocking tone. "My lord. Stormfly's not the only dragon in here, and even though spears and swords may be cleaned, some say dragons can still smell the blood of their cousins on the iron."

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Author's Notes: Just for the record, anything that happens in Race to the Edge is irrelevant to Bond. This was plotted out long before the new season aired. If there is anything in the new season that can be incorporated, it will be. Accuracy went out the window and burned in the opening of episode one.

This is a tough point in the story to write. (Hence the slow update.) I have an ending in mind, but I'm having trouble connecting here to there.

Thank you to Scordatura for proofreading.

I don't own How to Train Your Dragon or Inheritance.

## 8. Chapter 8

Special Note: Heather and Dagur are not siblings in Bond. This story was plotted out long before Race to the Edge aired, and I opted against changing it since it would require me to rewrite parts of Bond.

### Chapter 8

As soon as she said it, Dagur lashed a hand out and seized her jaw, invoking a chorus of warning shrieks led by Stormfly, who raised her wings and prepared to charge. Without meaning to, Astrid shrieked, then kicked at her assailant, but she felt the cold steel of the mad chieftain's sword and froze.

"Now would you be threatening me, woman?" Dagur leered, then frowned in confusion. "What is your name? Assa? Asta? something like that? hrmm."

Astrid grappled with his hand, rolling her eyes back to look at Stormfly, who was screaming and stomping her feet but otherwise making no move to rescue her. The dragon had recognized the sharp blade in the Berserker's hand, the cold metal that invoked so many

bloody memories: wounds that wouldn't heal, friends and hatch mates that died, long and dark nights spent in cold, unforgiving cages. \_Good girl, just stay there.\_ Astrid closed her eyes, struggling to breathe.

"Isn't this fun, Captain?" Dagur asked, holding her so only the tips of her toes touched the ground. "Just look at that beast. Will it risk its rider's life and charge? Or will it stay put and watch me kill her?"

"Sirâ€¦." Captain Vorg said uneasily, raising his spear as stocky Gronckles crept out of their nests in answer to Stormfly's distress. A chorus Terrors hissed. Left heads of Zippelbacks made harmless warning sparks between their teeth while their right-headed counterparts bared their teeth in snarls. Even a Timberjack's head snaked out of her nest. Dragons of every species stirred and came forward to teach this stranger who dared threaten one of their own a well deserved lesson.

Spots began to crawl before Astrid's eyes as the blade pricked her skin, drawing a thin trail of blood along her neck. \_A weapon!\_ She gasped. She needed a weapon! A knife, an axe, anything that would get this maggot-riddled troll off her!

"Sir, please!" The Berserker captain pleaded.

Then she suddenly heard the familiar snarl of an even more familiar Monstrous Nightmare and opened her eyes. Hookfang was crawling into the Nest, his massive, hooked claws raking the sand. The dragon narrowed his great, yellow eyes at them, smoke rising from his nostrils, before he was followed by his obnoxious rider, who stopped dead in his tracks and stared at them.

No one moved.

Snotlout looked back and forth between the Berserkers and Astrid, between the dragons and Stormfly, then slowly-ever so slowly-reached for the sword at his hip. Hookfang growled. Captain Vorg raised his spear and prepared to face him.

Suddenly, Dagur released Astrid and she fell to the ground with a cry. "Kidding, kidding! I wouldn't kill Hiccup's woman. Such a barbaric thing would beâ€¦.well, deranged, wouldn't it. Not to mention an act of war. And we don't want that, now do we, Astrid?"

She coughed, clutching at her throat, "You toad."

"Manners, my good woman." He chastised her, grinning maniacally and waving a finger in her face, then he abruptly stood and whirled around. "Captain, let's go. I have the strangest feeling my Heather may be missing me."

"Sir." And without a glance toward either Berkian, the Berserkers made their way out of the Nest, though only Captain Vorg took care to avoid Hookfang's long tail.

Snotlout waited by the entrance to watch them leave, then trotted to where Astrid still knelt on the floor, rubbing her bruised neck.

"Hey, you okay?"

Astrid coughed. "I'm fine. He didn't hurt me that badly." That was a lie, but she didn't need him fussing over her, and she brushed away his hand when he offered to help her to her feet. "Gods, that was humiliating!"

"What they were doing here in the first place."

She wasted no time. "Dagur's rebuilding his army to take control of Berk." She reported in a soft voice, just in case the crazy warlord was hiding just outside the tunnel.

"Whoa! Seriously?" Even Hookfang snorted in surprise.

"I spotted them sneaking out of the Great Hall, so I followed them here. All these years, Dagur's felt the Berserker's have been humiliated by the new treaty, so he plans to challenge Berk again." Astrid crossed her arms. "He also mentioned someone named Menafora was helping them."

"Who's Menafora?"

"I was hoping you knew by some chance."

She was surprised to see her least favorite friend give the matter some consideration. Actually think about it. His brow furrowed, his arms crossed, and his eyes narrowed to tiny slits. \_He's not going to hurt himself, right?\_ Astrid glanced at Hookfang, who returned her gaze with a nonchalant stare. Snotlout pursed his lips and tapped a forefinger against his elbow, then his face lit up in revelation.

Only to become puzzled again. Then he shook his head and made an even deeper frown, mouthing the name to himself. Finally, he just shook his head again. "Nope. Sorry, Astrid. I've never heard of Menafora before. I'll ask around though, if you want. Maybe Gothi or Gobber know who he is. Or she, I suppose. Does Menafora sound like the name of a man or woman?"

"Woman, I would think." Astrid whispered and rubbed her neck again. "I'll ask around too. And we'll need to tell Chief Stoick and Hiccup about Dagur's intentions."

"Of course."

"Be sure to-" Astrid froze as a sudden hiss reached her ears, a quiet shivering voice that whispered like the scales of a serpent, like the scrape of an enemy's armor.. Astrid's skin crawled when she heard it. It froze her, paralyzed her, reminded her of the same eerie sensation she felt when the Flightmare doused her with its defense mist. "\_Slytha.\_" It breathed in her ear. A pair of cold hands with long, tapering fingers closed over her shoulders. Astrid felt her eyelids begin to grow heavy. "\_Slytha.\_" It murmured again.

\_What's happening?\_ She closed her eyes as her knees buckled, but she did not hit the ground. Rather, the stranger behind her caught her under her arms and lowered her gently to the ground and she found herself staring up into the shadowed face of a hooded figure. \_Who are you?\_

"\_Slytha.\_"

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Eragon couldn't help but smile at Saphira's stubborn nature. When Fishlegs had loaned them the Book of Dragons to help pass the time in Mildew's smelly, old house, his dragon had snorted in disdain and refused to have anything to do with it. Now, as he sat back against her scaled side with the heavy text on his lap, he could sense her giant blue eyes reading along with him. If she could read, that is. She certainly had never sat in on any of Eragon's lessons with Brom, but she didn't need to. If she wanted to read human letters, all she had to do was rely on his thoughts and memories. The question was if it interested her enough. He pondered asking her for a moment, then shook his head briefly, and turned the page to the Night Fury.

\_Strike Class.\_

He looked up as the door opened, but it was only Mildew stepping in with an armload of firewood. They nodded semi-courteously to each other. More courtesy on Eragon's part. Mildew merely seemed to offer a noncommittal grunt and dropped the wood onto the dying fire. Yet before he had a chance to stir up the embers, Saphira leaned her great head over the hearth and breathed a steady stream of flame over the fresh logs.

The old man fixed her with a dour look before grumbling a reluctant 'thank you' and walking back to his chair. Fungus followed him and curled up at his feet, tucking in his hooves and laying down his head. "She's handy, I'll give her that." Mildew muttered, his head down and his arms crossed. "And maybe not as ugly as most dragons."

Eragon raised an eyebrow and smirked. "Sure. I suppose the sheep isn't so bad either."

"Bahâ€|." Fungus sleepily closed his eyes.

Saphira snorted in disdain and lay her head down, training her large, blue eye on the Book of Dragons. The Night Fury, Eragon read, was twenty-seven feet in length with a forty-eight foot wingspan. Nocturnal, breathed a limit of six plasma shots, was capable of an 'echolocation' ability, and was overall one of the fastest and most intelligent dragon in the Archipelago. But in spite of everything that was known about the Night Fury, it was one of the least understood dragon species.\_ So far as they've seen, Toothless is the only Night Fury ever found.\_ Therefore, nothing was known about the social interaction of the species. Were they social and lived in small or large groups? Or were they solitary and came together only to mate? How did they mate? What did their eggs look like? How many did they lay a year? And what was the incubation period? What was their natural habitat like?

Eragon raised his head, hearing a whisper of the night air outside Mildew's house. The old man himself didn't seem to notice, and in fact seemed to be fast asleep. Was that Hiccup visiting them? Or had one of these Berserkers wandered up here. Silently rising to his feet, Eragon made his way to window.



Saphira let out a loud breath of air. \_Those are the wingbeats of a dragon.\_

Eragon had been thinking the same thing as he recognized the soft rushes of air that could only come from Toothless' bat-like wings, and as he glanced outside, his elven eyes quickly picked out the black dragon moving against the stars. In regards to its stealth, the Night Fury was definitely misnamed. Thus satisfied, he moved to open the door, only to have it suddenly thrown open in his face. Eragon jumped back and Mildew leaped out of his chair, startling Fungus, who bleated angrily at the Rider in the open doorway, backed up by his ever loyal dragon.

Hiccup did not look pleased. At the sight of his sour face, Eragon tensed, his hand shifting quietly to Brisingr, and Saphira fixed the elder rider with a sharp, blue stare.

"Out." Hiccup said to Mildew.

The old man cast an uneasy look between the two of them, then raised a finger and edged his way toward the door. "You know, I find tending to my cabbage patches at night to be quite the relaxing pastime." He gave nervous laugh. "Come, Fungus."

"Bah!" The sheep scuttled forward, unimpressed by Hiccup's attitude, and took great pains to headbutt his artificial leg on his way out.

The door shut behind the pair, leaving Eragon alone with the elder Rider. Hiccup wasted no time. "Tell me what the spheres are. I know they're not eggs." Eragon was taken aback by the ferocity in his voice, but before he could say anything, Hiccup continued, "This afternoon, while I was hiding the eggs with Astrid, one of those spheres spoke to me."

\_What?\_ Eragon turned to Saphira, who seemed just as taken aback as he was. \_I can hardly believe Glaedr or one of the other old dragons would reveal themselves like that.\_

\_"\_Perhaps it was one who is lost?\_"

"You \_heard\_ the voice?" Eragon said in disbelief. "Just by touching it?"

"Yes, a voice crying out for help." Hiccup closed his eyes, taking a deep breath, as though calming himself down from the fright of his life, and seemed to retreat into a world of his own. "It sounded so scared. I tried reaching out to help, but no matter what I didâ€¦." He swallowed what appeared be a painful lump.

Eragon clenched his jaw, guilty for letting his friend experience something so unnerving. \_But what caused the EldunarÃ- to suddenly speak up like that? "Saphira?"\_

His dragon did not answer.

"What are they?" Hiccup demanded in a hiss, interrupting his thoughts.

"\_Glaedr?\_"

He felt the old dragon's consciousness brush against his, gently, almost tentative. "Tell him what he wishes to know. Further lies may make Hiccup lose his trust in us. And if that happens, it will mean the Berkians' death. Should they turn against us, you, Saphira, and we the Eldunar- will have no choice but to retaliate, and our combined strength would only the island and Hiccup's people." Without waiting for an answer, Glaedr spoke aloud, "Many greetings, Hiccup Haddock of the Isle of Berk and Toothless, Night Fury and the unholy offspring of lightning and death itself."

Hiccup's eyes went wide, alarmed as he whipped his head around in search of the voice before realizing it was originating from his own mind. "Who are you?"

"His name is Glaedr." Eragon answered. "My mentor and partner-in-flight to the elf Oromis."

"Is he a dragon? A Brightscales?"

"I am."

Hiccup put a hand to his head. "I thought you said Saphira was the last of her race. Where is this Glaedr hiding then? Can all dragons from Alagësia communicate at a distance?"

Eragon swallowed. "I may have something to add to your account of the Alagësian Brightscales. The truth is, they are ah, different from the Berk dragons. They have magic, and those who ride them can tap into that power."

"You're a witch?" Hiccup took a step back, subtly raising his hands as though to protect himself.

Eragon shook his head. "No. A Rider." And with that, he began his tale of Alagësia anew, this time without leaving anything out. He started by explaining in further detail the power that all Dragon Riders and elves possessed with the power of the Ancient Language, how everything in the world had a true name. "For example, brisingr is fire, s\_tenr is stone, and so on." He remained vague on the rules of magic simply because Hiccup wanted the overview first. He would ask for the details later.

For now, the chieftain's son merely stared at him and exclaimed, "It was you. You're the one who broke Toothless' tail. I knew those breaks were too strange to be wear and tear, but you broke it with this power. But why didn't you use magic to steal the egg back?" His green eyes darkened as another thought occurred to him. "Or kill me."

"I was worried you could use magic, too." Eragon confessed. "And if that were the case, provoking you would've prompted us to kill each other."

"And the spheres?"

Again Eragon hesitated, so it was Glaedr who answered. "We are the Eldunarya, literally the 'heart of hearts'." And he proceeded to explain the significance of a dragon's Eldunar-, how it was a powerful organ, capable of storing energy and serving as a means for

communication. An organ a dragon could disgorge and into it transfer his or her consciousness and continue to 'live on' even when their Rider passed into the Void. The Eldunarya were what allowed the mad king the strength he needed to overthrow the Riders and the all else who opposed him. By this point Eragon had removed Glaedr's EldunarÃ- from its crate as well as Umaroth's and placed them in front of Hiccup who stared at them in amazement.

"And you can live while you're in this state?"

"\_Yes and no.\_" It was Umaroth who spoke this time, quietly introducing himself. "\_It may not seem as living in the same sense as you yourself would see it. As EldunarÃ-, we have no need of food or drink or sleep. We are more souls tied to earth rather than breathing creatures.\_"

"An \_aldnrari\_ that burns forever." Hiccup murmured.

"\_Precisely.\_"

Eragon's throat tightened as Toothless crept forward and sniffed at the pair, then made a sad rumbling noise in his throat as he brushed Glaedr with his muzzle. His Rider lowered his eyes. "And what of the voice I heard?"

"\_Likely a dragon from long ago who lost their hold on their sanity.\_" Glaedr explained. "\_That was one of the many reasons for our elven companions, to assist us in aiding our brothers and sisters.\_"

Hiccup raised his head, looking as though he'd forgotten all about them. "Wait, do you think you forgot because of a spell?"

"It's possible." Eragon said. "But what worries me is who, or what, was powerful enough to overwhelm the strength of a Rider and elven spellcasters."

"Stupid question, but is it possible the elves did it to you for some reason?"

Saphira growled, though not with any malice directed at Hiccup and raised her head. "\_No elf would ever turn their back on a dragon.\_"

"Saphira's right. There's not a doubt in my mind BlÃdhgarm or the rest of his kin would turn against us. They swore their oaths in the Ancient Language."

"Oaths can be broken." Hiccup argued.

"\_Not ones sworn in the Ancient Language.\_" Glaedr said. "\_No oath sworn in the ancient words can ever be broken. If BlÃdhgarm and his companions have gone missing, it was either because Eragon released them from their vows, or they were somehow captured.\_"

Hiccup seemed to accept this and nodded. He was taking all this very well, Eragon noted, impressed by the older Rider's fortitude. \_Although what choice does he have considering what's been happening these past few days?\_ A lesser man might've broken from the alarming

convergence of their different worlds and cultures.

"I have one last question." The heir to the Berk Tribe murmured. "Why did you keep this from my village?"

"Becauseâ€¦." Eragon fumbled for an answer. "When I left Alagãœesia, High Queen Nasuada threatened to impose a strict regulation against those who used magic for fear of another King Galbatorix arising. If Berk were to become exposed to magic, not only would it increase her fears but it would undoubtedly bring ruin to your people. Your family."

"You believe she would try to subjugate us into her Empire? Her control ofâ€¦.magic users isn't fear." Hiccup said gravely. "It's paranoia."

Eragon lowered his eyes. "I don't know. Nasuadaâ€¦.Her Highness became another person entirely when she became queen. I fear depriving the sorcerers, the witches, the elves, and the Riders their freedom to use magic is only the beginning."

"She could become the Galbatorix she fears so much."

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Heather was in the midst of dropping a log onto the fire when her husband and chieftain strode into the tent, striking his axe into the earth and tossing his helm after it. Captain Vorg followed him in, though his helmet remained on his head. "I don't like it, sir. If Chief Stoick and his son should ever hear of this-

"Quit your worrying." Dagur grinned and turned to her. "Heather, be a dear and bring us a couple mugs of mead. Leave the flagon."

The insult of being regarded as a mere servant had lost its bite ages ago, replaced by a feeling of what she called hopeless resignation. Her lord husband dropped into a seat before the fire and before the captain could join him, he was laying out his plans for Berk. Awful plans that wherein enslaving Hiccup's people was the kindest of Dagur's ideas. With uneasy hands, Heather poured out two mugs and set them before the men, as she'd been directed. Captain Vorg refused to meet her eyes. Dagur seized her wrist and yanked her into a seat beside him, wrapping an arm around her shoulders, loose enough to look casual, firm enough not to let her go.

She clasped her hands and lowered her eyes, waiting for the moment to pass. Dagur's attention span was short, especially when she was involved. He would soon lose interest. All she had to do was wait for that moment.

"â€¦.kidnapping is a direct violation of the peace treaty, sir." Captain Vorg was saying.

Heather looked up. \_What? Kidnapping!\_

"Just keep those dragons muzzled and under control." Dagur waved his tankard around. "They shouldn't be a problem, especially since we have their riders under lock and key. I really must commend you, Captain, for being able to contain a Nadder and a Nightmare at the

same time."

\_Astrid and Snotlout!\_ It took everything in her not to tear herself out of Dagur's grasp and go running to their ships too see for herself, but Captain Vorg's next words chilled her to the bone.

"No, we have Lady Menafora to thank for this, sir."

"Whatever, then." They spoke little after that, not even long enough for Heather to refill their tankards. Dagur again recited his plans for Berk once they were finished with Hiccup and his tribe. Distracted by her thoughts and the painful grip of Dagur's hand on her shoulder, Heather only heard single words and clipped phrases from her chieftain like, "â€|sold into \_thralldom\_â€|" and "â€|subjugate the landâ€|" or even worse. "Death."

She swallowed and closed her eyes. Maybe she could free the captives after Dagur was asleep. Would she be able to get away? She eyed the flagon. Maybe if she convinced him to drink enough, he would pass out early tonight. Her jaw clenched in determination and she glanced up at the men. It was possible.

As soon as the captain had gone, though, Dagur ignored the mead to her astonishment. He released her shortly, took up one of his many knives, and began the disturbing task of sharpening it. Heather winced at the sound of the whetstone scraping across the steel, and briefly feared he intended to use the weapon on her. It wasn't something she would put past him, although he'd never exactly hurt her with a sharp object. \_Scrape. Scraaaape. Screech. Scrape.\_

"Why are you doing this?" She dared to whisper, taking up her cloak and wrapping it around her shoulders.

"I do this for the Berserker Isles." He answered immediately, strangely calm, something she found far more disturbing than his out-of-control rants. "I'm doing this for the sake of our Clan."

She didn't miss his usage of the word 'our', his way of reminding her she's part of the Berserker Tribe now. Reminding her she belongs to him. And that awoke an anger in her she thought she'd buried on the night of her wedding. Kidnapping Hiccup's lover and his cousin?" She demanded, louder than she intended. "You \_have\_ the Berserker Isles, Dagur. Shouldn't that be enough for you? Berk has done nothing to you that wasn't in defense of their own lands. And for what? Berserker paranoia?"

Dagur didn't look at her.

Suddenly realizing she was shouting, Heather shrank back. "Forgive me, my lord. I didn't meanâ€|."

"You know that wasn't my decision." Dagur growled. "You know it was Menafora who took them. A kidnapping was never part of my plan." Gruffly, he seemed to add under his breath, "I already know kidnapping doesn't work."

"Menafora obeys your command." \_Shut up!\_ She told herself. \_Shut up before he gets angry and strikes you.\_ "You could have stopped her!"

"\_Menafora\_," Her husband corrected. "Acted on her own free will. She saw them as a threat and removed them. Relax, Heather, she'll keep them alive. They're of more use to her that way."

\_Useful.\_ Heather swallowed, wringing her hands. \_Useful how? What on earth does that witch have in store for them?\_

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Author's Notes: Whoo! Just in time for October! If anyone else finds Toothless' forty-eight foot wingspan hard to believe, so do I, but that's what the TV series says.

A reminder: Originally, this story didn't have plot or conflict, so in chapter two's author's notes, I asked all of you which direction you wanted the story to go. A number of you replied with several ideas, several of which I decided to use. You'll be seeing those soon, so I'll be crediting all of you with those ideas. Thank you so much for helping me out then! You awesome people made Bond's plot possible!

Next update: Shooting for Halloween, but no promises. Promises jinx it.

\_Aldrarnari\_ - The Old Norse were from which the term EldunarÃ- was derived. It means fire.

How to Train Your Dragon and The Inheritance Cycle do not belong to me.

## 9. Chapter 9

### Chapter 9

Author's Notes: â€|.Soâ€|it's been awhile. I know I said Halloween, butâ€|.well, I suck at deadlines and, hey, it's hard to goof off and try to keep up with classes and finals. Thank you for your patience, and thank you for your impatience. It keeps me motivated. I'm hoping the next chapter will be up soon, it's one I've been wanting to write for awhile now, actually since this story became multi-chapter. And again, Race to the Edge (which I have not finished, so no spoilers, please) is irrelevant to Bond.

Thanks for your support and enjoy chapter nine.

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"You're taking this awfully well." Eragon remarked after a long pause.

"No, it's shock. I'm in shock." Hiccup answered, keeping his curious green eyes locked on Glaedr's EldunarÃ-, which he was holding in his hands. Eragon fell silent, giving the Berk Rider a moment to process everything he'd told him. Glaedr didn't seem to mind the scrutiny; he hadn't even protested when Hiccup suddenly lifted him up without warning or when Toothless sniffed at him. "Why was it necessary to hide all of you, Glaedr? Couldn't Eragon have hidden you away with a spell of some kind?"

\_"There is a spell." \_ Said Umaroth. Hiccup looked up at him. \_"A way to create a 'pocket of space' in which it's possible to hide multiple treasures. However, it is a dangerous and difficult endeavor, one that is preferable to establish in a permanent location. Besides, nothing but magic can damage a dragon egg or Eldunarya, so the actual danger to them is limited."\_

"I suppose you're right." Hiccup smiled uneasily. "We don't have anyone like that in the Archipelago. Except maybe Gothi and the other village elders. But that's just an old wives' tale."

\_"Indeed."\_ Glaedr murmured as Hiccup put him down and turned to Eragon.

"What about the elves? Can't you use your power to try to findâ€" He stopped. "No. I suppose if you could, you would have done so already."

Eragon nodded and took one of Mildew's ceramic bowls down from its shelf and carefully poured out the contents of a nearby water jug. Hiccup frowned and turned to his dragon in confusion, but Eragon paid them no mind and whispered softly into the bowl. "\_Draumr kÃ¶pa\_" Immediately, an impenetrable blackness as dark as ink flooded the bowl as though someone had dropped a bottle of shadows upon it.

Hiccup gasped and leaned forward, a look of fear and astonishment crossing his features. "I-I'm going to guess it's not supposed to do that."

"No." Eragon confirmed and let the vision fade. "This is called the dream stare, or scrying, a way to see objects from far away, but only what you've seen before in person. Objects, places, beingsâ€" "

"I know what scrying is." Hiccup interrupted, then smiled sheepishly. "Sorry. Like I said, old wives' tale." A silence stretched between them for the briefest of moments before the elder rider ventured, "I don't, uhâ€|. I don't suppose you couldâ€|."

"You'd like a demonstration of how it really works?" Eragon asked.

"If you wouldn't mind." Hiccup murmured hesitantly. "It's justâ€|"

Rather than wait for him to finish, Eragon turned his attention to what he could show his Berkian friend. Something that was sure to work. No one he knew from AlagÃ¶esia, of course. He would see Murtagh or Queen Nasuada or even the \_TalÃ¶-ta\_ just fine, but it could be impossible for Hiccup. Besides, he had already scried all of them and found Murtagh and Thorn flying through the misty white of a sky unknown to him, Her Grace sitting through a council meeting, and the \_TalÃ¶-ta\_ also against a field of white. Curiously, from the way her sails were full of sea wind, she also appeared to be sailing, not docked at some harbor.

"How about Astrid?" He suggested and leaned over the bowl. "\_Draumr kÃ¶pa\_" Belatedly, he realized the young woman would be sleeping by this time and scrying her could be considered a violation of her privacy, but it was too late. The spell was cast and he had no choice

but to finish it. The water in the bowl first became clouded, swirling like mist before giving way to the dream stare.

Across from him, he noticed Hiccup's eyes widen as the image of his friend and comrade became clearer and clearer, until finally, "What in bloody Helheim?" He demanded, his eyes wide and appalled.

Eragon was shocked as well. Instead of finding Astrid asleep in her home as he'd feared, a far worse image swept across the mirror: Astrid Hofferson, gagged and bound hand and foot, lay on a creaking wooden floor, her back to the cross bars of some kind of cell. She appeared to be unconscious, as did the second dragon rider beside her, whom Eragon identified as Hiccup's cousin Snotlout.

Hiccup reached out and gripped the bowl. "Howâ€¦.how could they? Why now? It's been years sinceâ€¦." Then a cold anger crept into his eyes, obliterating the warm, forest color they normally held. "Dagur." Toothless snarled at the image as well, then abruptly shot a plasma blast at the bowl, shattering it into dozens of tiny pieces, and let out a ferocious roar.

Eragon snatched his hand away as Mildew came rushing back into the house, Fungus hard on his heels. "What's all this racket about then? Don't tell me you twoâ€¦"

"What do you mean Dagur?" Eragon asked, bewildered. True, he didn't know the Madman Chieftain as well as the people of Berk did, but he saw nothing about the dream stare to implicate he was the culprit.

"I've seen the bars of that cell before." Hiccup growled angrily, rising to his feet. "They're in the Thor-forsaken  
\_BanahÇ«gg!\_"

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Astrid didn't know how long they'd been imprisoned, though supposed it had been a least a couple hours, long enough for her arms to ache and her mouth to go numb. When she'd opened her eyes, the room was almost completely dark, except for some small shafts of sunlight peering in through cracks in the ceiling.

At first, the last memory she had was of the Great Hall and the feast welcoming the Berserkers. Perhaps she'd had more mead than she'd supposed to and someone had brought her home, but when she'd shifted to rub the line of drool that had wormed its way out of her mouthâ€¦"grossâ€¦"she found her hands had been wrenched behind her back and bound at the wrists. Startled and briefly terrified, she tried to shout for help and kicked her legs out only to find a rag over her mouth and her ankles tied together.

Snotlout was in a similar condition but already awake and had worked himself into a sitting position against the wall of their cell. He looked surprised, and probably relieved, when she raised her head to look at him, but the expression quickly changed to his usual, self-assertive, 'Don't worry, I got this.' smirk that usually meant he had no idea what he was doing. In spite of herself, Astrid had felt some reassurance of the familiarity of his attitude, no matter how annoying. On the other hand, Hookfang and Stormfly were nowhere to be seen, and that worried her.



Closing her eyes, she concentrated on the faint rocking of the floor, confirming her suspicions they were on a ship, mostly likely \_BanahÇ«gg\_, the Berserker flagship. Or perhaps one of the smaller vessels, the \_DauÃ°r\_ or the \_VÃ-nber\_ to throw a rescue party off the scent\_. \_Who names a ship VÃ-nber?\_ Astrid wondered disdainfully, stretching her head around for a means of escape, or at least cutting the ropes binding her arms. Maybe, with some struggle and cooperation, she and Snotlout could work together to untie each other. Their fingers were free, after all. They were perfectly capable of undoing knots provided they got close enough.

First thing was first, she had to sit upright. If Snotlout could do it, then she could, too. Astrid took a breath and prepared to roll onto her belly and push herself upright when she caught sight of her clansman's face. Snotlout was staring at something outside their cell and when she turned to look for herself, she froze. There, standing just on the other side of the bars, wrapped in a dark blue cloak, was Heather. Just staring at them, her forest green eyes blank.

\_You vile shrew!\_ Astrid screamed in her gag. \_I trusted you! Felt sorry for you!\_ She screamed other obscenities at the wretched woman and kicked wildly at the doors of her cell, filling the silence with a loud metallic clanging that should've brought guards running. \_Traitor! Liar! Witch!\_

No one came, and Heather merely stood there, holding herself as though she were cold, her green eyes distraught. "I'm so sorry."

\_Like Helheim you're sorry, you filthy sow! Frigga, when I get out of here, I'm going to-\_

"I didn't know you'd been captured until I heard some Berserker soldiers talking about it." She continued, looking away from her glaring eyes. "Dagur wouldn't let me see you, so I had to wait until he fell asleep. He's been up drinking all night. Are you hurt, Astrid?"

Astrid was more sore and cold than hurt, but she couldn't let on, so she just glowered at the woman.

"Don't worry, I'll get a message to Hiccup as soon as possible, I swear to Thor." The Berserker Lady gripped the bars of the cell. "Just hang in there. I neverâ€" A loud \_clang\_ off to the side prevented her from continuing and, with a fearful glance back at them, she went running in the direction she came. Astrid craned her neck to watch her go, but as soon as the woman was out of sight, she dropped her head onto the creaking floorboards with a sigh.

\_How did we get caught? The last thing I remember isâ€|right, that hooded figure. It said a word to me and I started to fall asleep. Who was that? What was that?\_

Never mind that now! The important thing was to escape. She wondered if they'd been missing long enough for their clansmen to notice, and if they were planning a rescue party. No doubt there would be a skirmish and kerfuffle over that. \_Why would Dagur do this, though?\_ She wondered, looking around the cell, vainly hoping for something sharp to cut the ropes. \_Surely if he'd wanted to cause trouble,

Hiccup would be a better target. Or Stoick again. Helheim, even Spitelout's branch of the family would do. \_Well, there was Snotlout, she considered. Had she been captured simply because she was in the wrong place at the wrong time?

Then a more disturbing thought came to mind.

\_I caught Dagur in front of the dragon nursery and overheard his plans to 'avenge the Berserker honor'.\_ And he'd asked her if she was Hiccup's girl. She'd obviously overheard something she wasn't supposed to, and she knew Dagur wanted nothing more than to hurt Hiccup especially, even if his plans to crush Berk failed. Was he planning on using her to do so? Her and his cousin both?

Astrid shook her head and worked her jaw as she tried loosening the gag, then squirmed and rolled around on the floorboards, pulling at the ropes as hard as she could. When they did not budge even in the slightest, she huffed in exasperation. This was going to take awhile.

Some movement on the other side of the hold caught her attention and she froze, pushing herself upright as excitement and relief flared in her heart. \_Stormfly!\_ But no, the creature in the cell across from theirs was most certainly not Stormfly. It wasn't even a dragon. It looked like a man, except instead of skin, he was covered in peculiar, dark blue fur. Like a cat or a wolf. Except a man!

\_What in the name of Thor is that?\_

-0-0-0-

To Eragon's surprise, instead of storming out with Toothless and taking off into the night to rescue his friends, Hiccup immediately sat down again and crossed his legs, tapping a long forefinger against his artificial limb, "No, I can't just go barging down there just because I saw a 'vision in a \_bowl\_'." He said to himself. "That's insanity."

Toothless grumbled, glowering at his partner-in-flight.

"I know, I know, but right now Dagur doesn't know that I know about this. He probably thinks he has until tomorrow evening at the latest before someone on Berk realizes Astrid, Snotlout, and their dragonsâ€¦.oh, Thorâ€¦"

"Vision in a bowl?" Mildew shook his head. "What nonsense are you spouting now, boy?"

Hiccup let out a long sigh and lowered his head. "I need to think."

"\_No,\_" said Saphira, rising to her feet. "\_It's possible for us to rescue your friends tonight.\_"

"Saphira?" The Berkian raised his head.

"\_If your enemies have captured your mate and cousin, then it means their partners-in-flight have been locked away as well, and for that, the Mad Chief is unforgivable.\_"

Eragon nodded in agreement. "She's right. Now that there's no need to conceal the magic Alagësian Riders possess, we'd could sneak down there right now and free all four of them."

"You can do that?" Hiccup seemed hesitant. "I don't know. If you're caught, Eragon, it would mean trouble for all of us."

"Yes, but if we can free your clansmen now, before anyone else on Berk notices they're gone, none will be the wiser." Eragon explained, gaining momentum now. "Dagur won't be able to question anyone either without seeming suspicious. Besides, who knows what he'll do to them in the meantime. Let's go now!"

Still, Hiccup hesitated, considering the matter. "Well, Dagur wouldn't expect a rescue this early." Toothless rumbled in agreement. "Glaedr?"

The \_Eldunar\_ seemed just as tentative as Hiccup was. "\_I agree that we do have the element of surprise on our side, and we would not be considered the most gracious of guests if we allowed our hosts, especially dragons, to be held prisoner during our stay. Howeverâ€"\_"

"I will take every precaution." Eragon assured him, then repeated himself in the Ancient Language for good measure. "What say you, Hiccup?"

"No." Hiccup shook his head.

"What?"

The black rider rose and placed a hand on Toothless, gritting his teeth as he spoke, "Even if we could do it, which I don't doubt, Dagur will still wonder how I knew my clansmen had been captured. And even though he's crazy, he's been known to show unexpected stints of brilliance. Besides, Astrid and Snotlout will want to know how they were rescued, and it'll be suspicious if I refuse to tell them. It's the only way to keep your secret."

Eragon gaped at him. "You would place my secret over the lives of your friends?"

"You're my friend, too, aren't you?" Hiccup stated matter-of-factly as he looked at him, then turned to Saphira. "It's very kind of you to offer your assistance, but I can't allow you to put yourself in danger on account of us."

"\_Hiccup.\_"

"Don't worry." Hiccup's mouth curled into a forced yet determined grin. "I've got a plan now."

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Name Meanings:

BanahÇgg - death blow

DauÃ°r - dead or death

VÃ-nber - grape (Who names a ship VÃ-nber)

Disclaimer: I don't own How to Train Your Dragon or the Inheritance Cycle.

End  
file.